BEN HECHT

Count Bruga

FULL OF MURDERS, SEDUCTIONS, MAGICIANS

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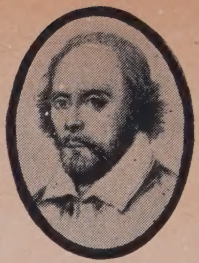

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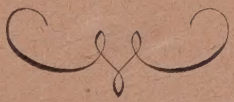
COUNT BRUGA



BY

BEN HECHT

Avon Books

NEW YORK

JO. MEYERS E. B. WILLIAMS

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Printed in U.S.A.

J. MUSACCHIA

Biographical Note

BEN HECHT was born in New York City on February 28th, 1894; educated in Racine, Wisconsin. He began his newspaper career with The Chicago Journal in 1910, and later was in charge of the Berlin office of The Chicago Daily News. He is the author of many books and plays, and was the producer (with Charles MacArthur) of Crime without Passion and The Scoundrel (a motion picture).

COUNT BRUGA

I

COUNT HIPPOLYT BRUGA was neither a count nor was his name Hippolyt Bruga. He lived in a loft above a patent medicine manufactory operated by an irascible Cuban named Rodenja Pamphula, who suffered from (or, it may be, was blessed with) satyriasis—a condition which he proudly attributed to the constant use of the Pamphula Golden Elixir.

Thus Pamphula regarded his disgraceful conduct as a potent advertisement of his wares and was not above inducing his innumerable paramours to invest in bottles of his tonic whose alleged qualities, he assured them, would restore the bloom and habits of youth to their cuckold husbands. Thus it was that Pamphula having quitted the company of the receptive matrons of the neighborhood left a souvenir of hope upon their sideboards, his magnanimity extending even to collecting only the wholesale price for the celebrated Elixir.

Pamphula was married to a woman named Antonica, a buxom melancholy matron who spent a goodly part of her time bewailing her husband's infidelities. The neighborhood in which she lived was alive with her complaints but inasmuch as the imag-

inations, not to say experiences, of her confidantes were unable to credit any one man with the multitudinous adulteries of which she complained, it was generally said behind her back that she was a raucous, evil-minded creature in need of a good beating from her over-tolerant husband.

It was in Count Hippolyt Bruga alone that the harassed Antonica found an intelligent and considerate audience—and it is for this reason that the unfortunate domestic affairs of the Pamphulas have been referred to at all, inasmuch as they are in themselves of little consequence to the waiting narrative and contribute, in fact, a misleading bourgeois air to its beginnings. It is impossible however to introduce a hero so human, so authentic as Count Bruga without pausing for a moment to insure the reader's conviction of his existence by pointing out the manner in which he supplied himself with nourishment, four walls and a roof.

Briefly, Antonica had found a haven for her battered emotions in the arms of her aristocratic tenant. His seductive though unintelligible words—for he spoke in a manner which sounded to her only vaguely like English—had awed her peasant's soul no less than the aloof, meticulous ways which distinguished him, such as bowing from the waist when addressed, raising his blond eyebrows as if struggling to keep awake in the grip of an overpowering ennui and, finally, deliberately running his manicured forefinger down one side and then the other of his thin reddish mustache.

She had yielded him her wifely virtue as the climax of a three-hour arraignment of her husband's immoralities—a preface which he had borne with a courtesy and understanding which the good Antonica found irresistible. And she had left his embraces on this first happy occasion giddily contemplating his parting words which had been, "Your hair is like a tortured midnight."

Curiously, her fall from that moral grace which had always been her ideal of womanhood served to improve not only Antonica's temper but to fill her with the first stirrings of social pride—an emotion hitherto foreign to her simple soul.

Despite the intimacies experienced with her lover Antonica was never without a feeling of awe when she knocked furtively on his door. And on tip-toeing out of the barren loft which he inhabited she was never without a feeling of having by some miracle dallied, Cinderella fashion, in the splendors of a superior world.

Thus it was that Count Hippolyt's board and lodging, not to overlook telephone service and other domestic accessories, the obtaining of which offers usually so unromantic a background for the heroic and the bizarre, were assured him in a manner in no way demeaning to his poise as an aristocrat and an exquisite.

The fact that on entering his loft one evening after three months of occupancy, Hippolyt found standing on his table a bottle of Pamphula's Golden Elixir caused him, however, to raise his reddish eye-

brows and ponder nervously whether his "rent" had been raised or whether this seemingly significant gift deposited on his table was nothing more than a naïve offering before the altar of an idol. Hippolyt's egoism inclined him to the latter fancy, but lessons learned at the cruel feet of reality decided him in favor of the first argument.

And with a sigh in whose sound was compressed the entire philosophy of pragmatism, he turned to the kettle filled with chicken stew, Spanish style, which stood beside the golden labeled bottle.

II

Twelve years before the appearance of Count Hippolyt Bruga in the loft owned by Antonica's husband, a young man named Julius Ganz and subsequently known to hundreds of indignant people as Jules Ganz had arrived in New York.

He was a fairly tall, blond youth, with reddish eyebrows and possessed of a savage and capricious mind, abominable manners and an arresting talent for the writing of an icily sensuous species of poetry. He at once devoted himself to the conquest of that part of New York which lies below Fourteenth Street and which is distinguished by the presence of the disorderly and embattled Parnassians of tomorrow.

As a boy Julius Ganz had fled home and enlisted

in the United States Army. Following a stretch of eight months spent in a Texas guard house for assaulting a second lieutenant with a beer bottle while drunk in a border café, the youthful soldier was given a dishonorable discharge and commanded never to show his face again within shooting distance of his comrades-in-arms.

In his efforts to return to his home in Illinois, Julius was arrested six times for vagrancy, thrown into as many jails with epileptic negroes and other vermin-ridden derelicts for companions, and after twelve months arrived at his father's house because he had no other place to arrive at and because it had been his habit to sustain himself during many weeks of hunger with succulent visions of his father's butcher shop.

Ganz père who had never ceased during the four years to brood upon the unnatural lack of filial piety in his son booted him down the back steps no sooner had he caught sight of him. Two months later Julius, not yet twenty-two years old, had arrived in New York and within a short time began to be hailed as one of the most gifted leaders of a new school of subtle and effete poetry identified in the left wing literary gazettes as Vorticism, Imagism, Syntaxism and Polyphonicism and more broadly assailed in the right wing literary gazettes as Vers Libre.

Jules Ganz's emergence on the literary horizon resulted chiefly in augmenting the numbers of those who considered him unfit for human society. His two different publishers each inserted clauses in their

contracts that he was never to appear in person at their offices and the editors of such magazines as had succumbed to the undeniable if eclectic beauty of his work gave strident orders to their underlings that Jules Ganz was to be barred from their sanctums regardless of what excuses or demands he might make.

In the literary-social circles into which our hero intruded—it was his habit to attend all functions called to his attention by studio gossip—the outraged literati fought with each other for the privilege of throwing him out. It was the poet's habit to arrive at parties covered, whatever the season, by a weather-beaten garment salvaged from his military past which he had for six years utilized as an overcoat. This covering removed, he stood revealed in a shrunken, bespattered, discolored, odorous, but always carefully pressed habiliment.

Smoking his corncob pipe in which he kept continually smoldering an offensive tobacco called Nigger Hair, Jules would plunge noisily into the festivities, hoping before being thrown out to achieve either a state of complete drunkenness or the seduction of some famous actress in a momentarily unfrequented part of the salle de danse.

He charged to a conquest with all the grace of a fishmonger bawling his wares through reluctant alleys. Yet his advances were not without a fleeting lure for their victims. They beheld, if they were courageous enough to stand their ground for a few moments, a leering, prancing, gutter Dionysus,

guffawing obscenely in their ears, pawing their evening gowns with the elation of a mangy dog digging the earth for a buried morsel—and demanding an immediate surrender of body and soul. They noticed, also, if they were capable of noticing anything during these seductive moments, that Jules Ganz had phenomenal eyes—pale, albino eyes devoid of light; that in the midst of his guffaws and attempted assault his eyes regarded them with murderous contempt.

Ordinarily when not engaged in sensual conquest, he kept his eyes rolled upward as if he were mocking some St. Cecilia lost in contemplation of divine music. But under the influence of emotion, whether fighting valiantly to embrace a woman or to resist being pushed down flights of stairs, his eyes achieved a milky quality, his slightly granulated lids reddening ominously.

Women who slapped his face grew frightened as if they had made some incredible mistake and sensitive gentlemen while punching his head were overcome with uneasy memories of the delicate and often beautiful words to which he signed his name as a poet.

Most amazing to his enemies was the fact that despite the insults which they piled upon him Jules continued imperviously to regard himself as a species of social lion—and even human ornament. He was apparently inexhaustible, unquenchable, and invulnerable. Nobody had ever beheld him in moments of calm or even languor. He consumed liquor in

quantities which became legendary. He had been known to eat up, before being caught, a buffet supper prepared for ten guests. And he had been pursued down the street by horrified guests in quest of their evening wraps, hats, rubbers and umbrellas which Jules, with a sudden passion for aggrandizement or perhaps revenge, had snatched from the vestibule on being ejected.

Although he frequented studios in which the arts were utilized chiefly as creaking, noisy springboards into the bedroom, Jules's only successful amours were conducted and frequently consummated in the rear of Greek restaurants and deserted parks, although sometimes he managed to achieve the superior luxury and shelter of a tenement hallway. Yet, with tell-tale leaves, twigs, patches of mud and even chicken bones clinging to his trousers and protruding from his coat collar, Jules would startle his listeners with hints of Bacchanalian hours spent in the boudoirs of exclusive Park Avenue odalisques, his eyes waiting milkily and defiantly for contradiction—and it is significant that contradiction seldom came.

For Jules as an oaf, pouring quarts of liquor into his inexhaustible gullet, capering about like a chimney sweep intent on an evening's rape—Jules emptying cans of pepper on his food, drinking Worcester sauce out of a bottle, stuffing uneaten halves of chicken into his pocket—in short Jules the social lion was one antagonist whom numbers could always be relied upon to overcome and remove.

But Jules the conversationalist was a menace against whom there was no adequate defense. His mind, spurred by controversy, bubbled and snarled with derisions. A venomous lyricism that appalled and hypnotized even its victims characterized his most casual responses. But even more disturbing than the verbal guillotines on which he excitedly adjusted his opponents were the ear-splitting howls of delight with which he abruptly punctuated his phrases. He would in the midst of an argument fall into an ecstasy of appreciation over his vis-a-vis's fancied discomfiture, howling, beating the floor with his feet, pounding his knees with his fists, and then emerge from the demonstration with an even more startling abruptness—his face clearing in an instant, his milky eyes staring at their victim with an aristocratic and contemptuous aloofness.

Two incidents will serve to complete the study of our hero during these formative years. Hailed though he had been in numerous quarters as one of the three or four important poets of the day, Jules nevertheless considered himself the victim of a critical conspiracy aimed to minimize and, if possible, to ignore him as a man of letters.

He based his attitude upon the fact that he had in the course of seven years unsuccessfully competed in three hundred and twenty-one prize poetry contests, inspired alike by the desire to appear as a blue ribbon poet and by the irresistible lure which the prizes varying from ten to five hundred dollars held for him.

A good half of his time was spent in a correspondence with the prize-awarding editors of the country, denouncing them for months and even years after the contest had been settled, for dolts, scoundrels and grafters and seeking to heap coals of fire on their heads by pointing out that he, Jules Ganz, as a result of their ghastly and fantastic stupidity in again withholding his just reward was now the three-hundred-and-twenty-second ranking poet in America—having lost that many contests—a fact which would cause posterity to split its sides with sardonic laughter, et cetera.

Enclosed with these fulminations were copies of the prize-winning contributions, carefully analyzed, their clichés, dullness, lack of merit and unrelieved worthlessness pointed out phrase by phrase.

America's entrance into the World War aroused our hero to heights of invective which distressed even the radical anti-war groups into whose midst he unhappily gravitated. His offers to take the rostrum and aid the anti-war cause were nervously refused. With the draft registration excitement in full swing Jules managed finally to attract the sympathy of the pacifist workers among his acquaintanceship.

He announced with a ferocity that left no room for dissuasion that he would see himself flayed alive before inscribing his name on the draft rolls and being driven along with the rest of the swine into the trenches. Having thus pronounced himself a draft dodger he went about mercilessly and even

brilliantly denouncing the cowardice of patriots wherever he chanced to encounter them.

Knowing that his antics would soon attract the government's attention and that his failure to register in the draft would bring down on his head a long prison sentence, a group of æsthetes with pacifistic convictions induced him to go into hiding. They provided him with a basement flat near the river and, having sworn him not to show his head outside, took turns bringing him daily baskets of food, periodicals, books and even female companions to brighten his lonely, heroic retreat.

For three months Jules lolled in his haven, his ribs filling out under the ministrations of his new friends. He grew a beard, which turned out red and which contributed a Christly air to his face. Likewise as the months passed he became capricious and often intolerable in his demands, calling for strange viands and precious liqueurs and higher types of female companions.

Any resistance on the part of his benefactors resulted on his part in furious threats to give himself up to the government and name them all as accomplices and to testify that they had not only abetted him in his crime but had influenced him by their literature and preachments to its commission.

Infuriated by this repugnant and ungrateful side of the hero to whose rescue they had come, Jules's custodians cursed and fumed impotently under his blackmail. He climaxed his irrational requests by demanding that a celebration in his honor be staged

in his "cell," pointing out that while he was suffering from this debasing incarceration for his ideals, his colleagues were enjoying their freedom, attending theaters and living on the fat of the land.

The story of Jules Ganz's fantastic seclusion, becoming known to thousands of people, reached in time the, at that moment, frenzied attention of the guardian press. A newspaper reporter carrying the information to the Federal sleuths was astonished to learn that these enterprising gentlemen were aware of the situation and that their reasons for not arresting the defiant poet were that he had on the first call for draft registration duly registered claiming no exemption, duly appeared at the medical examining board and been duly rejected for service at the front owing to his flat feet, his near-sightedness and his previous army record.

Jules's hoax was given space in the newspapers and aroused one of the few good-natured laughs in that hysteria-crowned period. With its publication a group of outraged male pacifists arrived at their hero's retreat for the purpose of beating him up and found the basement-flat empty and a message nailed to the bedroom door. The message, carefully typed in capitals on the typewriter which they had provided him and with which he had decamped, read:

"I WILL BE REVENGED.
JULES GANZ."

The foregoing details dispose somewhat sketchily of the first period of Jules's life. This period came

to an end eleven years after his arrival in New York. It may have been that the weight of loathing, contempt and hatred our hero had managed to create in these eleven years finally pressed too heavily upon the armor of his egoism. This is a belittling theory put forth by many of his detractors at the time.

There is also the probability that Jules tired of the stupidity and fatuousness which he chose to consider as the sole characteristics of his contemporaries—and with a nostalgia for worthier scenes devouring his mysterious soul, shipped aboard a cattle boat bound for South America.

He was gone a year. His whereabouts and performances remained a mystery. He corresponded with no one, not even the prize contest editors. And the repugnance which his name had been wont to arouse in the numerous circles that had known him gradually translated itself into Villonesque reminiscences and legends.

In his absence his poetry managed to present a totally different Jules Ganz to the attention of such of the literati who read poetry. And the boast of having thrown our hero down flights of stairs at some past revel became less a boast of social superiority than a good-natured hint of intimacy with the vanished poet.

III

Jules Ganz alighted from the cattle boat *Susquehanna* in the harbor of New York after an absence of a year and proceeded methodically about the business of transforming himself into Count Hippolyt Bruga.

Tucked away in the various bulging pockets of his clothes were $1,200—the profits of an almost uninterrupted three months' rummy game.

Never in all his turbulent life had Jules offered so odorous and disreputable a surface to the outward senses as he did at the moment in which he decided to confer upon himself the grandeurs and habits of a Polish aristocrat.

A nostalgia had borne him back to New York, a locality which a less hardy egoist might justly have felt as alluring as a plague. Confronted by the familiar scenes of his embattled past a curious disquietude filled his soul. Friendliness and loneliness had brought him back, yet he had only to present himself in any of a hundred otherwise hospitable gathering places to become forthwith a target for invective assault.

Pausing under the suspicious eye of a policeman Jules's fancy suddenly created an effulgent and gaudy vision of himself before which a socially awed

world would bow contrite and pleading his pardon for its past behaviors. Automatically the name of Count Hippolyt Bruga presented itself to his thought.

A Turkish bath had been his first destination. After six hours of continuous bathing, steaming and rubbing, Jules found himself before a long mirror regarding a body curiously whitened and glowing.

A perspiring attendant whom he had between baths despatched on numerous errands greeted him with an air of creative pride.

"Well, some change, eh?" the bulging rubber pronounced.

Jules stared at him snobbishly. Then he inquired coldly after his purchases. Quickly arraying himself in undergarments and socks, whose silken texture immediately inspired in him an air of casual world weariness, Jules sauntered in and out of the chambers of the bathing institution until the novelty of his appearance had ceased to bewilder him. He then dressed and went out.

Further transformations were accomplished during the next hour in a barber's chair. Walking now on Broadway, sniffing languidly at his aromatic mustache, Jules caught an unexpected glimpse of himself in a store mirror. A frown quickly dispelled the hauteur of his pose.

Lost in the proud consciousness of his whitened body, his silken undergarments and hose, the fetching lavender garters and the incense-like emanations

of his hair, he had overlooked entirely the matter of clothes. For a disgusted moment he stared at the disillusioning image in the mirror and no aristocrat accustomed to a life of fineries could have felt a deeper sense of violation than did Jules Ganz at the sight of the familiar rags hanging from his body. Indignantly Jules raced toward the door of a clothing store.

His subsequent antics convinced a bevy of greedy solicitous salesmen that they had to do with some dangerous albeit munificent eccentric. Jules insisted upon a black swallow-tail coat, the lapels of which, edged with grey silk braid had caught his eye. He contemptuously shouted down a salesman's offer of a pair of grey-striped trousers which, he was assured, went with the coat. Jules's reply was that they were the conventional association affected by bourgeois minds. Chuckling happily to himself he selected a pair of baggy brown and white marked tweeds instead.

His investments in a shirt, tie, handkerchief, belt, shoes, hat and cane were accomplished throughout a rising confusion complicated by the fact that he insisted on putting on each new purchase as soon as it was made.

It was late afternoon when Jules finally reappeared in the street carrying a glittering suitcase laden with duplicates of his elegant exterior. He walked slowly toward Fifth Avenue, pausing at a florist's to add a massive yellow chrysanthemum to his lapel.

To sum up the matter of Jules Ganz's metamorphosis in a single statement, this glittering carnival of style and beauty which, to the amazement of several thousand nervous strangers, sauntered dreamily into Fifth Avenue was not Jules Ganz. It was, from its gleaming silk hat to its equally gleaming patent leather shoes an ensemble hereafter known to its owner as Count Hippolyt Bruga.

The invulnerable egoism which had once enabled Jules Ganz to regard the sincere repugnance of his fellowmen as nothing but a cloak for their secretive, malicious envy of genius, inspired him now with the heady notion that the startled expressions he surprised in the faces of all he passed were naïve and admiring tributes to his splendor.

Hippolyt registered at the Ritz Hotel, inscribing his new name and title on the book and, maintaining with difficulty his air of lassitude in the face of the flattering excitement stirred in his wake, arrived in his rooms and dismissed the bell boy with a lordly half dollar. Without removing his remarkable hat or taking time to examine his new quarters Hippolyt sat himself down at a wonderfully carved desk and wrote out twelve copies of the following letter:

My dear Editor:

My master, Count Hippolyt Bruga, scion of the highly powerful Polish house of that name, instructs me to inform you of his arrival in your city. It is his wish to reveal to the world certain important adventures through which he

has recently passed. Count Bruga will be at home to your representative in his suite at the Ritz Wednesday afternoon between the hours of three and five.

His Highness begs me to inform you further that he does not carry photographs of himself about with him.

Respectfully yours,
REMY MANKIEWICZ,
Gentleman in Attendance to
His Highness, Count Hippolyt Bruga.

R.S.V.P.

IV

Count Hippolyt Bruga received the press with a series of formidable bows that gave him the appearance of a man discovered in the midst of his setting-up exercises.

Shaking himself down after the impressive ritual of greeting until his swallow-tail had recovered its original perfections, Hippolyt at once produced a bottle of Bourbon and a carton of cigarettes which he gravely and modestly proffered the visitors.

There were three reporters and two photographers.

The curious letter received in their offices had resulted in a short but thorough investigation. Be-

fore waiting upon the expectant nobleman the Press had assured itself that (a) there was no record of a Count Hippolyt Bruga in the archives of the Polish Consulate and that (b) the phenomenal personage who was registered at the Ritz under that title was a disreputable poet named Jules Ganz.

Scenting a hoax or at least a half column of jocular copy, the reporters, two of whom were familiar with the social details of Jules's past, arrived at the Count's door fully posted and prepared.

Nevertheless they were astonished.

There was about this perfumed and radiant impostor who greeted them the ludicrousness and poignancy of an ideal caricature. His elegant grimacings, the profound and exquisite niceties of his manner, the solicitous yet ennuied gallantry with which he welcomed strangers into the privacy of his rooms—all these had about them the air of some superb aristocrat turned mountebank.

He was perfect even in the moment in which, his guests seated, he stared over their heads and regarded himself with wearied indifference in the tall mirror at the end of the room. Indifference to the image of Count Hippolyt Bruga was a social climax which only a Hippolyt Bruga could hope to achieve.

The drinks having been served and sampled, the cigarettes lighted, the reporters looked at their host with some embarrassment. Finally one of them ventured a statement:

"We all know, of course, that you are Jules Ganz, the poet. How did you happen to become a count?"

To this logical query Hippolyt replied:

"I happened to become a count through the fortuitous chemistry of procreation. The gates of life are patroled only by the whims of chance and passion. The same unfortunate methods utilized by nature in the production of newspapermen are responsible, it is painful to admit, in the creation of a nobleman."

His listeners annoyed by this unsolicited and ponderous burst of sarcasm contented themselves with an interchange of meaningful glances. One of them, however, unable to bear the outrage, quietly and revengefully began writing down the speech on a pad of paper. Hippolyt paused and waited considerately until the man's pencil came to a stop.

"Are you going to take it all down?" he inquired. "If so I will speak more slowly."

"Oh, no. Go right on," the reporter answered, blushing. "I'll just take notes now and then."

Hippolyt concealed his disappointment admirably. After satisfying himself that none of the newspaper men was going to make a literal transcription of his words, he turned to the desk and removed a sheaf of papers from its drawer. With a slow bow before each of his visitors he presented them with copies of the following document:

> These words, I hope, will fully satisfy whatever curiosity may have been aroused by the fact that I, who left America a year ago

as Jules Ganz, have returned as Count Hippolyt Bruga.

Thirteen years ago I decided upon the experiment of sinking my nobility behind the exterior of a vagabond. Although born an aristocrat and accustomed to the tradition of my class I realized that in order to develop the genius I felt in me I would have to plunge myself into the whimsical maelstrom out of which Villon, Verlaine and so many other of my spiritual ancestors had been born. Not wishing to embarrass my family, I left my home —severed all connections with the noble name of Bruga and migrated to America. I decided to call myself Jules Ganz after a drunken and miserable buffoon, one of the many peasants employed on the Bruga estates. I borrowed not only the name but the manners and social exterior of my one time unruly servant. . . .

Concerning the adventures which befell me during my long masquerade I must as a gentleman remain for the time silent. I am not yet prepared to reveal the things which I, an aristocrat playing the part of jester to the bourgeois literati of New York, was able to learn. . . . A year ago I returned to my home in Poland. I thought to finish my days among my own people and to take up once more the pleasing duties of an aristocrat. But America, perversely enough, called me and again I became an exile. This time, however, my experiment

as a vagabond at an end, I return as a Bruga, upholding the tradition of that ancient name.

I shall continue to amuse myself with the writing of poetry and because the irony pleases me I shall continue to sign the name of the drunken and miserable Bruga servant—Jules Ganz, to my literary work.

(Signed) COUNT HIPPOLYT BRUGA.

Ritz Hotel
May 4, 1924.

"Are there any questions you would like to ask?" Hippolyt inquired after his visitors had obviously finished reading the statements placed in their hands.

The reporters shook their heads.

"This will answer perfectly," said one of them.

The two photographers stepped forward.

"How about a picture?" they inquired in unison.

"If you insist," Hippolyt replied.

As the men set up their cameras, he opened the door of a closet and removed his silk hat, yellow gloves and silver handled cane from a shelf. Placing the hat carefully on his head and drawing on one of the gloves, Hippolyt took his stand before the photographers.

"I prefer this pose," he replied to their professional suggestions; "it is more characteristic."

Leaning his weight nonchalantly on his cane, he tilted his head slightly and fastened his eyes upon the mirror at the other end of the room with an air of vast and congenital ennui.

V

People laughed at Count Hippolyt Bruga but not so much in his presence. Beheld, he became too fanatic a jest for laughter. Hippolyt's appearance, his manner and his gravity were invitations to a species of mirth which most people found difficult to achieve. There was, in short, too much to laugh at. And for this reason Hippolyt came to be regarded as a masquerade in the presence of which the wits of the town contented themselves with theatrical gestures of credulity.

There was also the matter of Hippolyt's intimidating responses. But all these things involving the poet's participation in the general life of his day must wait some future page for chronicling. For Hippolyt had no sooner embarked on his new career than a tremendous adventure befell him, one which for the time interfered vitally with his original social plans.

He had checked out of the Ritz, appalled by the week's inroads into his rummy winnings, located himself in Rodenja Pamphula's loft and was sauntering this April evening down Broadway, meditating with amusement on the heavy-handed efforts at satire with which the newspapers continued to refer to him, when an electric sign over the Star Theatre

heralding the presence of Enrico Panini, the World's Greatest Magician, met his eye. The sign excited Hippolyt. It is possible that Destiny thus communicated its mysterious plans to Hippolyt, through the inexplicable emotion stirred in his bosom by the illuminated name, Panini. At all events, acting as if he had received an irresistible goad Hippolyt bounded into the lobby and chuckling with enthusiasm purchased a seat in a box.

The performance was on. He seated himself, adjusting his cane, gloves and silk hat carefully on his knees, and raised his eyes to the footlights. Simultaneously, to a burst of eerie music, there emerged from a large black trunk on the stage a young woman in a coruscating costume of lavender, scarlet and gold. The auditorium rattled with applause and a graceful man with a proud and charming face turned to bow his gratitude. This was Panini whose amazing antics were, as much as such matters ever can be, the talk of the town.

Hippolyt, however, had no eyes for the celebrated maestro. On beholding the creature who had appeared, it was evident, under mystifying circumstances from the trunk, he experienced a sudden languor complicated by an intense literary urge. This dual emotion he recognized as the birth of love. He sat ogling the magician's assistant for the rest of the evening, feeding his desire for her with descriptive adjectives and excitedly assuring himself that after a search of many years he had finally stumbled upon his ideal of womanhood.

She was an unreal and carnelian puppet, he meditated emotionally, glittering, futile, somnambulistic. And with a feeling of increasing wonder he watched her materialize out of gilded cages, glass cabinets and empty cornucopias; reappearing and vanishing to the accompaniment of cartridge explosions and unnerving bursts of music; floating in the air, turning into large bowls of rice, papier-mâché rose bushes and a flock of sleepy doves.

Forgetting, in the sudden depth and partiality of his newly kindled love, the presence of the magician, Hippolyt was overcome with the variability and talent of the young woman.

He sought her out after the performance, presenting himself at the door of the great Panini's dressing room. The magician was at the moment seated on a couch and staring somberly into space. He turned and continued to stare at his caller who received his glittering, preoccupied gaze with the disdain it merited. Slowly Panini's eyes widened and the film which at the moment seemed to seclude him from life, lifted. He picked up the card he had dropped a few minutes ago and after studying it briefly, leaped inexplicably to his feet, his brooding face lighting with happiness.

"Ah, Count Hippolyt Bruga! How do you do? Come in . . . Come in. I am pleased to see you. Sit down. Here. Ah, you have been in the theater, yes? You like my performance! what a magnificent flower! Allow me."

And the magician, moving as if on invisible

springs, plunged his nose into the chrysanthemum in his visitor's lapel.

"I would like to meet the beautiful, young woman who was on the stage with you." Hippolyt spoke slowly in a manner designed to rebuke the presumption of his host. Panini looked at him puzzled for an instant.

"It is not me you wish to see?" he murmured sadly.

"No," replied Hippolyt, "it is not. I merely wish you to introduce me to the beautiful and talented young woman I have spent the evening admiring."

"I am overwhelmed with disappointment," the magician spoke gravely. "Amelia! you admire the Princess Amelia. She is fortunate. I will call her."

He rapped with his knuckles on the back of Hippolyt's chair.

"Voilà, she is here."

Hippolyt rose slowly before the spectacle of the Princess Amelia. She was in costume and had materialized in front of him as if once more summoned out of the air by Panini. For a full moment he regarded her without speaking, his eyes rolled upward in a wrapt and dolorous stare of adoration. The young woman stepped back in alarm.

"How do you do," he spoke finally and with Panini beaming excitedly upon the tableau, slowly removed his silk hat, placed it carefully on his heart and bowed profoundly. Straightening, he closed his eyes and in a dreamy voice added:

"Amelia, you are a mask of evil wistfully in quest of a soul."

"She does not speak," Panini interrupted, concealing his delight in a suddenly grave voice. The young woman retreated another step and turned appealingly to the maestro. He continued, "Although she can hear what you say she cannot ever answer."

"Speech," Hippolyt replied opening his eyes, "is a treacherous slave that grimaces behind the back of its master. Your silence," he concluded softly and bowing once more to the woman, "will be an altar for my words."

Hippolyt's ensuing courtship was conducted wholly in the presence of Panini. He returned to the magician's dressing room night after night to continue his strange ceremonious monologue before the festooned and silent Amelia, improvising magnificent, rococo flatteries for her ears. He offered neither caresses nor protestations of love. He confined himself to the uttering of similes and metaphors in each of which quivered for a moment the embellished image of Amelia.

He wrote poems to Amelia during the day and recited them to her during the half hour of his nightly visits. Amelia would listen, her eyes bewilderedly upon Panini as these curious outpourings fell upon her ear. The poem finished, she would extend her hand, wink furtively at the magician and receive the manuscript accompanied by the poet's inevitable salaam.

As for Hippolyt, he spoke, he dreamed, he lived

within phrases celebrating the stenciled figure and face of his enigmatic Princess. The gracious and perpetually smiling blue-eyed maestro remained for him during this period an intruder with whom he exchanged no more than courtly commonplaces. His several efforts, however, to lure the young woman out of the magician's presence were frustrated seemingly by Panini. This inspired Hippolyt with a new attitude toward his host and his half hours with Amelia were heightened by the certainty that Panini was his rival—a desperate and unsuccessful rival hiding his chagrin behind a mask of affability.

Then an unexpected thing happened. The Princess Amelia vanished. Hippolyt, arrived at the Star Theatre according to his habit of two months, found the place unexpectedly in darkness. Enraged by the indifference of the various theater attachés he managed by a great deal of shouting to rouse out of the gloom of the auditorium, Hippolyt finally encountered a bored and secretive gentleman who identified himself as the manager of the house and demanded to know the reason for the disturbance. Hippolyt, despite his growing alarm, was brief and lucid.

"Where is the Princess Amelia?" he asked.

The singularly obtuse factotum, it developed, had never heard of the Princess Amelia and, eyeing his inquisitor with morbid calm, suggested that he try some other theater.

"She is the young woman who assists Signor Panini," Hippolyt replied with withering patience.

"She wears scarlet slippers, gold-colored stockings, lavender knee breeches made of silk and a scarlet tunic embroidered with gold."

"Ask him," the man raised a finger, "he ought to know."

Hippolyt, turning, beheld Panini coming toward him.

"This gentleman," said Hippolyt, brutally stressing the noun, "has been trying to persuade me that Amelia does not perform at this theater."

"Ah," Panini smiled, slipping his arm through Hippolyt's. "I knew you would be looking for Amelia. So I came here on purpose to find you, my friend."

"Why isn't the show on," Hippolyt inquired indignantly. "It's after ten o'clock."

He moved down the alley in the graceful but vise-like grip of the magician.

"Because," Panini answered, "I have closed for the summer. It is too hot for magic."

"Where is Amelia then," Hippolyt insisted coldly.

"That is what I came to tell you," his guide smiled. Then drawing off a step he surveyed Hippolyt with transparent delight.

"I have never seen you in the street, my friend," he exclaimed. "You look magnificent. But perhaps there should be a new flower for the lapel, yes? A big yellow one. This one, alas, is dead, is it not?"

Hippolyt listened patiently and then repeated:

"Where is Amelia? She was here only last night."

"I see I am cruel," Panini answered, "but it is perhaps even more cruel to tell you. Amelia is gone. She has disappeared, vanished."

Hippolyt halted and regarded the magician wildly.

"What!" he cried. "Where has she gone?"

"Come," Panini spoke soothingly, "we are attracting the attention of the bourgeoisie, dear Count. We will go in here and have something to eat, yes? But first—a new flower. And then we will discuss how best we may find the missing young woman."

VI

Hippolyt regarded the golden labeled bottle of Pamphula's Elixir which his idolatrous landlady had placed on his table and sighed nervously. The servile and amorous Antonica, like all philanthropists with an ax to grind, was becoming a menace. The prospect of sharing with this awed and buxom admirer an evening of stolen joys was particularly harassing at the moment. For Hippolyt was in the embrace of grief.

His passion for Amelia, that vanished pearl among women, had fed upon the misery of her absence. It filled his veins with a dark and restless despair and paralyzed his thought into a solitary image. The bottle of elixir was offensive.

"A realistic clown capering upon the dark edges of my dream," he muttered and removed the alleged aphrodisiac to the mantelpiece. Antonica, he reflected bitterly, would be more difficult to dismiss than this telltale and rebuking emissary of her hopes. He had managed to evade her for a week. Dully he visualized her now, inflamed by his neglect, prowling salaciously in the hall, ready to pounce upon him—a panting, giggling Nemesis. With a heavy heart he seated himself before the kettle of chicken stew over which this lustful matron had obviously toiled with swimming eyes. He found it difficult to eat. Antonica leered out of the kettle.

He scowled and thought of Panini. For a week he had hounded that affable magician with a homicidal glare in his eyes, convinced that the man, inpired by jealousy had made off with Amelia. And then Panini, too, had disappeared. He was no longer to be found in his hotel nor in the apartment he maintained. Hippolyt regarded his disappearance as a complete confession of guilt.

Hungry though he was, he pushed the kettle aside, and rising walked up and down the long room. Alternately he cursed Panini and with rolling eyes breathed the name Amelia. He visioned her helpless and languishing behind doors guarded by the treacherous magician and a veritable nausea overcame him. For his grief was augmented by the singular notion that the young woman adored him.

She had never spoken, never given any indication of her passion for him, although several times she

had refused to enter the dressing room on his arrival, a fact which Hippolyt attributed to the overwhelming emotion he had aroused in her. But accustomed to the unexpected resistance his amorous overtures had always in the past inspired in well-dressed women, a resistance frequently rendered doubly repugnant by an accompaniment of shrieks and insults, Amelia's very silence had impressed him beyond any cruder demonstrations of love. Her bewilderment, her docility had become to Hippolyt evidence of a species of adoration to which he was, alas, not accustomed.

"Amelia," he murmured to the empty loft and in the single word he addressed his ideal—a glittering figure before which he had bowed his genius in worship. There had been other women but he dismissed them with a weary, contemptuous grimace. Amelia alone mattered. Her memory clouded his mind. Her absence emptied his heart. She was an obsession, a crown of thorns which he pressed deliriously upon his brow. He was in love.

He would continue his search in the morning. He would discover Panini. The image of the magician brought a new emotion into Hippolyt's eyes. His walk quickened. Excitedly he paced up and down the loft with his hands around Panini's throat and listening coldly to the scoundrel's pleas for mercy.

"Die," muttered Hippolyt. "No, sir. No, sir. Die as you deserve."

At this point the terrified image of Panini gasped

out the secret of Amelia's hiding place and collapsed lifeless at his feet. And then upon some night, Panini dead, he would open a door, stand like a deliverer upon a threshold and utter the one word "Amelia." And a young woman, silent and swooning with happiness, would sink into his outstretched arms.

A loud knock on the door halted him. Antonica! An eagle wounded, he wavered aloft for a moment and plunged to the earth. The knock was repeated as he stood glaring.

"She might at least have given me time to digest my dinner," he muttered savagely.

The thought of flight presented itself only to be dismissed. He had managed to elude his benefactress for an entire week. Further resistance would only endanger his board and lodging.

"Amelia," he sighed and allowing himself a short ironic laugh, stepped to the door and opened it. In the half-dark of the hallway stood Panini.

Hippolyt regarded this unexpected figure with doubt and then with a cry of rage leaped forward, hurling himself upon it. A moment later he lay on his back, a knee pressing heavily into his chest and Panini's voice sounding good-naturedly above him.

"I am glad I find you home, my friend. You will please not move for a while. It is bad for the clothes."

Hippolyt with a supreme effort kicked his legs in the air and strained his pinioned body against the

magician's iron grip. Panini, undisturbed, continued caressingly.

"I am very glad to see you."

Exhausted for the moment, Hippolyt scowled up at his guest and, baring his teeth, answered:

"I will kill you when I get up."

"That would be foolish," Panini smiled. "I bring you good news. I have found Amelia."

"Kidnapper," Hippolyt shouted. Again he writhed and kicked in a spasm of rage.

"Let me up. I'll kill you!" he panted.

"When you get up," Panini answered gently, "you will sit down in a chair and I will tell you where you can find the young woman of whom you are so fond."

While speaking he arose calmly and added:

"I cannot stay very long and we have much to talk about."

Hippolyt stood up cautiously, his eyes in a fury upon Panini.

"Now straighten yourself out," the magician smiled. "The coat is wrinkled. That is too bad. Allow me."

He deftly smoothed the disordered swallow-tail as he spoke, apparently unconscious of the murderous gaze bent on him. "There, now we look like two gentlemen. And the flower . . . ah."

He picked up the chrysanthemum which had fallen from its embattled lapel and replaced it swiftly.

"Voilà!"

"Where is Amelia?" Hippolyt thrust his face close to the magician's. "I'll give you one minute to tell me or. . . ."

"Amelia," interrupted Panini, "is in Brooklyn. I found her two hours ago after looking for two weeks. And I come here at once to tell you."

He sat down and Hippolyt moved, threatening but indecisively, toward him.

"Ah, chicken stew," the magician sighed, holding his nose over the kettle. "Spanish style. You have an excellent chef, my dear Count."

Hippolyt snatched the kettle away and placed it out of reach on the mantelpiece.

"I have just had my dinner," Panini murmured soothingly. "So you need have no fear. But, you are curious about Amelia, yes? I can see from your eyes."

Hippolyt, his head lowered, his pale eyes rolled upward, regarded his bantering visitor grimly and remained silent.

"Come," Panini pursued, "confess that you did me an injustice, that your jealousy of me was unwarranted, yes?"

"What is her address?" Hippolyt countered ominously.

"Number 18 Beek Street, Brooklyn," the magician answered.

"You'll come with me," Hippolyt clenched his fists, "and if she isn't there." He contorted his face into a promise of violence. Panini shook his head sadly.

"I have just come from there," he said, "and it would be foolish to return. Amelia has been away on a week-end visit and is expected back not until tomorrow morning. Tomorrow you will go there early. You will ring the bell. You will ask for Amelia. Voilà! The lovers reunited."

He accompanied his words with a flourish of his hands and deposited, seemingly out of the air, three bottles of champagne on the table.

"This," he smiled, "is to celebrate the finding of Amelia. My last three bottles of Clicquot. And of the very best. We will have glasses, yes?"

He paused a moment and then murmuring courteously, "Pardon me, you are preoccupied," arose and went to the mantelpiece.

"Aha!" he cried, selecting a pair of water glasses from the débris, "what have we here? A bottle of Pamphula's Golden Elixir. Unopened. Hm. Guaranteed to restore the vigor, renew the glands and revive the youth of its consumer."

A beatific smile covered his face for a moment.

"Perfect!" he breathed. "Sublime!"

Then assuming an air of concern, he added:

"Your secret is safe with me, dear Count. As an older man, however, I feel inclined to advise you. Think twice before you drink at this fountain of youth. What suffering, what confusion, what danger this harmless looking bottle contains. How much more fortunate you are without it, calm, above the goads of passion . . ."

He paused and with beaming eyes regarded the

murderous-looking poet. Smiling, he opened one of the champagne bottles. He poured the glasses and placed one before his host. The other he raised gracefully in the air.

"Come," he said softly, "I desire you to drink with me tonight—because I am sad and because you are happy."

Hippolyt's fingers closed around the glass before him.

"If you are lying," he spoke slowly, "and if I find you have so much as harmed a hair of her head . . ."

"Please," Panini interrupted, "I am your friend. From the moment I saw you I said, 'Ah, a man after my own heart. A poet, an aristocrat.' To your happiness!"

Hippolyt, sniffing the contents of his glass suspiciously, lifted it and without changing his ominous expression, replied:

"If you are not the liar I know you to be, why did she disappear?"

"Perhaps to make herself more desirable." Panini smiled. "Who can read the heart of a woman? And such a woman!"

Hippolyt scowled and drank, pausing in the operation to announce:

"I am not drinking in response to your florid and deceitful toast but because I am fond of champagne. Even your presence does not detract from its taste."

He regarded the magician savagely and with an aloof gesture refilled his glass.

"And why," Panini murmured, his eyes kindling, "do you dislike me? Have I not tried to be your friend?"

"There are people one dislikes," Hippolyt answered, his voice edged with passion, "for no reason."

He stood up and stared at his guest with an oracular and disdainful smile. A strange sense had entered his mind.

"I have known you for a fraud from the moment I first saw you," he spoke. "Something looked out of your eyes then that I forgot—until I saw you tonight."

"And what was this?" Panini whispered, leaning forward.

Hippolyt studied him coldly.

"Evil," he replied. "You are a strange and vicious mountebank who seeks to pervert the hidden diablerie of his soul into a single gesture of charm."

"You are a poet," Panini answered softly, "and therefore your words interest me."

Hippolyt sat down and contorted his face into a ferocious expression of delight. He nodded his head violently, beat a tattoo on the floor with his foot and pointing a finger into the magician's face, cried out:

"Deny it! Go on! Deny it! Tell me I don't see through your mask . . . that I don't know you!"

"What do you know, my friend?"

Hippolyt's excitement collapsed into a sneer.

"You amuse yourself," he replied aloofly, "by inviting me blindfolded into a dark room, Signor Panini."

The room is very dark." The magician's eyes gleamed as he spoke. "But I remove the handkerchief. Voilà! I am in great danger."

"Were I to invent a fiend," Hippolyt pursued calmly ignoring the revelation, "I would invent you."

"You are not interested in my danger?"

"I am more than interested," Hippolyt answered, his face suddenly beaming, "I am delighted."

"My death," began Panini.

"Your death," Hippolyt interrupted witheringly, "would be a delicious gift."

He regarded the magician in silence as he emptied his second glass. Then he continued scowling.

"I never knew what I felt toward you until you came into this room. If you have lied to me about Amelia I will kill you. But that's nothing. Nothing," he raised his voice. "You have aroused my hate for a deeper reason— From the first," he concluded viciously.

Panini's smile, veiled and gentle, remained unwavering.

"You sit there now," Hippolyt cried, "a courteous smirk on your face." He broke off and rolled his eyes upward. "I have felt it, from the first moment I saw you, a desire to—to . . ."

"To kill me," prompted Panini quietly.

"Strangle you," Hippolyt shouted. "You will allow me to finish my sentences."

"I admire hate." Panini watched the poet refill his glass. "It is the most perfect of the emotions and, therefore, of course, the rarest. How deeply could you hate a man, my friend?"

"Enough to strangle him," Hippolyt replied coldly.

"That is not enough," Panini smiled. "Come, let us drink to a superior hate."

He raised his glass, the contents of which still remained untouched.

"You are not curious about my danger?"

"You are like a sleepy fool," Hippolyt answered, staring thirstily at the second and unopened bottle, "trying to think of lies."

"It is true," the magician replied, doing the honors with the new bottle, "I am trying to entertain myself. I have not found life very amusing. Have you?"

"Life," replied Hippolyt coldly, "is a servant-girl's dream."

"You are a poet," Panini pursued, "and you see hidden things. Yet you have not seen that I, too, am in love."

"Amelia!" shouted Hippolyt springing to his feet.

"No, no, no," Panini smiled. "There is a woman whom I, lacking your keener perceptions, have found more charming than Amelia. And because of this I am to be murdered."

Hippolyt beamed and poured himself more wine. "When?" he inquired unctiously.

"Tonight," Panini sighed, "or perhaps in the morning. I am, of course, a little uncertain."

"It's a lie," Hippolyt answered calmly. "You are not going to be murdered," he glowered disdainfully at the magician—"except by me. In case you've betrayed me. If a single hair of her head has been harmed, I will not rest." Hippolyt's voice had taken on its finest oracular proportions—"until you have paid the penalty. . . ."

Again he stamped his foot and thrust his finger into the magician's face, his own features contorted with rage and triumph.

Panini threw back his head and laughed.

"Never have I enjoyed anyone so much as you, dear Count. And because of this, on my last night on earth, I have sought you out . . . And I am not without gratitude. I have restored Amelia. But more, I have made a will leaving you my wand —Panini's wand with which he could summon monsters and roses out of the air . . ."

He leaned forward, his eyes glittering, and closed his hand on the poet's wrist. Hippolyt smiled disdainfully under the pain of the cold fingers crushing him.

"You have seen evil in me," the magician spoke slowly, "because you are a poet and nothing in life is hidden from poets. But I am more evil than you understand. Or than you will ever know. Remember this when you receive Panini's wand—that he

was a devil. I talk to you because like me you are not a man . . . My death will remind you of this . . ."

There was a knock on the door. Panini's face abruptly resumed its graceful smile.

"A guest," he murmured, removing his hand.

Hippolyt arose slowly and a trifle unsteadily. The wine was in his senses. Visions of Amelia glittered before his eyes. She would enter now. He would kneel before her, his heart a couch for her beauty. The knock was repeated timidly, almost furtively. Hippolyt closed his eyes with a groan.

"Antonica," he muttered.

"Ah!" Panini sighed.

The poet walked grimly to the door. He opened it and bowed to conceal the revulsion the sight of the buxom, pomaded figure of Antonica brought to his soul. Giggling and bending her head coyly to her shoulder, the amorous matron entered the room. Her stout face was flushed and her black eyes danced excitedly. She halted at the sight of a stranger as Hippolyt closed the door behind her.

Panini had risen and was standing courteously expectant as the poet appeared. Hippolyt regarded him murderously.

"Madam Pamphula, Signor Panini," he pronounced the names with an impartial venom and without more ado sank into his chair.

"Madam Pamphula," the magician repeated gravely and raised one of her fidgeting hands to his lips. Antonica giggled and made a courtesy.

"I am overcome," Panini added.

He eyed his host roguishly, and noted that the poet had taken refuge behind an air of inviolable hauteur.

"To what," spoke Hippolyt addressing the bewildered matron, "am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

Panini, proffering a chair, adjusted Antonica soothingly in its seat and exclaimed:

"How blind you are, dear Count, to ask such a question. You will pardon me for betraying your secret, madam," he smiled graciously at Antonica, who was going through a series of abashed grimaces, "but one has only to look into her eyes to see that she has flown here on the wings of love."

Antonica, recalling to Hippolyt's outraged mind a seal balancing something on its nose, ducked her head to one side and, giggling, bestowed on the magician a grateful, even affectionate gaze. She had determined a half hour ago to give the evasive Hippolyt one more chance before throwing him into the street. Nevertheless she felt now, as always in the presence of her lordly tenant, blissful and confused. Indeed it was when her Hippolyt looked like this —so noble, so aloof—that she experienced the fullest unfolding of her passion. She ogled him pensively, intent upon waking in his aristocratic soul a simultaneous consciousness of her power as a landlady and her lure as a siren.

"Haven't we met before?" Panini was asking gravely. "This name—Pamphula . . ." He

paused, his face lighting, "Ah, yes, the Golden Elixir!"

He turned and lifted the bottle from the mantelpiece.

"My huz banda," said Antonica proudly, "heem make-a dees. It ees good. Ver good."

She turned a look of reproach upon Hippolyt.

"You have not open eet, aw," she chided him sadly.

Hippolyt closed his eyes slowly and then opened them in the manner of one whom hope has abandoned. He said nothing.

"My huz banda," Antonica resumed after a demonstration of enthusiasm on the part of Panini, "he make-a dees heemself."

Inspired by the sympathy which beamed in the face of this new confidant, Antonica was off on her favorite topic, the only one on which she could converse fluently in the presence of strangers—the staggering infidelities of her "huz banda."

"He dreenk-a one bottle every week," she sighed deeply. "He go way. He have-a one woman, two woman, ten woman every week. I say, 'Rodenja, I keel you. I am your-a wife. Eef you dreenk-a the elixir you stay home.' But no. He grab-a the bottle. He take-a so much, maybe a half a glass-a full. I watch-a heem. Hees eyes begin to shine. He start-a to dance, to laugh-a. And he grab-a hees hat and go away. . . . That ees my life."

Hippolyt inquired coldly:

"Where is your husband now?"

Antonica dissolved coyly in her answer:

"He go away. I come-a up here."

"When will he come back?" pursued Hippolyt cruelly intent upon arousing a sense of danger in the siren's bosom.

"Heem come-a back!" Antonica cried with a snort. "Ha! That man he have-a no heart. He leave-a me all day, all night. . . . He care-a I sit alone. I cry until my heart a break. 'Where you been,' I say. 'On beez a nuss," he say. 'How can you leave-a me all alone for beez a nuss. Fine-a beez a nuss you do. I know-a the beez a nuss.' Yes, heem come-a back!" Antonica repeated bitterly. "Thees morning he take-a half a glass-a the elixir."

Panini, having opened the third bottle of wine and filled two glasses pressed them upon his companions ceremoniously.

"Your husband," he smiled, "is unworthy of so tender and loving a wife."

"Yes-a mam," Antonica sighed, rolling her eyes.

Hippolyt swallowed his drink and remained silent. Panini, the scoundrel, was enjoying himself at his expense, inciting the witless Antonica to bursts of idiot laughter that caused her to roll in her seat, her mouth opened, her hands clinging to her explosive bosom. He would take care of Panini later, devote himself, he vowed furiously, to hounding and harassing the man for the rest of his life. Antonica, however, was the more immediate menace.

He listened to her once more holding forth on her "huz banda," spurred on by the diabolical Panini.

She was offering an outraged and detailed account of Rodenja's amorous activities, names, dates, addresses, descriptions. The loft seemed to Hippolyt to become crowded with the fat-faced and lecherous matrons of Rodenja's passionate days. Vainly he tried to sweeten his mind with the image of Amelia.

He sighed her name inwardly and cursed himself for the poverty which prevented him from seizing his hat and fleeing the room. Food and lodging for an indefinite period were rolled up in this giggling and unsavory bundle of flesh. He had made an error in borrowing money from her—four dollars in all—yet the trifling sum had inspired in her a boldness whose meaning was unmistakable. An idea suddenly came. He would be kind, courteous. He would wait until the malignant Panini had gone. Then he would explain to her he was ill, that he must deny himself her embraces for a few days more since the doctor had cautioned him to rest and be quiet.

Relieved by his faith in this simple ruse, Hippolyt raised his eyes in which fury and martyrdom contended for an uncertain moment and then smiled faintly upon the siren.

Panini, refilling her glass, applauded his obvious change of mood with exuberant words.

"Behold," he cried, "now that you have come, madam, he does not need any further elixir. He is happy. He is young. Love shines from his eyes."

Antonica, instantly aware of her lord's thawing,

leaned amorously toward him and whispered throatily in his ear:

"Hippolyt-a, you dreenk-a one leetle glass-a from the elixir . . . for Antonica, one leetle glass-a."

Hippolyt closed his eyes, the smile remaining fixed on his lips.

"Tomorrow," he answered.

It was the first word he had spoken in a half hour. At the sound of his voice Antonica's bosom heaved languorously and a solemn look filled her bold eyes.

"You like-a the chicken stew I make-a, aw," she murmured.

"Yes," replied Hippolyt hissing the word briefly.

"Thank-a you mam," Antonica giggled, "aw, that so nice a man. Much nicer than my Rodenja. Oh, much, much nicer . . ."

Her mind disorganized by the three glasses of wine she had consumed, Antonica was enjoying giddily the impatience of passion. She turned appealing eyes upon her late confidant, screwed up her mouth meaningly and then, covering her face with her hands, laughed guiltily at her immodest thoughts.

"The lovers sit lost in dreams," Panini cried, springing to his feet, "and it is time for me to go."

Antonica beamed politely.

"I am a magician," Panini continued, bending over her. "Would you like me to perform for you? Magic?" he added solemnly.

"Yes, mam," Antonica murmured. She had slipped her hand over Hippolyt's.

"I am inspired," said Panini softly, turning to the poet. "Ah, dear Count, you are the last man to see the great Panini—and what could be a more perfect setting for his last performance."

He had gathered a number of articles from the mantelpiece as he spoke. With a cry of "Voilà!" he tossed them one after the other into the air.

Antonica watched the juggling, her face filling with wonder and admiration.

"It is thus I prefer to say good-by—to you." Panini was speaking as the air over his head remained filled with bottles, cups, combs, knives, and plates. . . . "No man has ever been able to juggle fourteen objects in this manner—and there will be no one to take my place . . ."

Hippolyt kept his eyes studiously on his wine-glass. Antonica suddenly poked him with excitement.

"Look-a, look-a!" she cried. "Eet disappear. . . ."

Draining his glass, Hippolyt replied contemptuously.

"The antics of a mountebank do not interest me."

"And now," Panini exclaimed, holding up his empty hands before the astonished Antonica, "I bring them back. Voilà!"

He drew a plate and comb mysteriously out of the air.

"And so, madam, you carry knives in your hair, ha!"

Three knives apparently removed from her coiffure sent Antonica into peals of laughter.

"And behold," Panini continued, "in the Count's pocket. What do we see? There, with your own hands, madam, remove it!"

Antonica, still giggling, leaned over and removed the golden labeled bottle of Pamphula's Elixir from her tenant's swallow-tailed coat.

"Oooh, ooh!" her voice broke into a squeal. "Eet is empty . . . Eet is empty. Look-a!"

She held the opened bottle aloft and excitedly turned it upside down.

"Yes," Panini spoke gravely, "he has drunk it."

"The whole-a bottle!" she cried, staring happily at Hippolyt and then in a voice trembling with awe, repeated slowly, "the whole-a bottle . . . my God-a! Hippolyt-a!"

With a cry of rapture Antonica flung herself suddenly upon the immobile and frowning poet. Her bosom smothering his face, her plump arms deliriously choking his neck, Hippolyt made an effort to rise. His chair overturned and with the ecstatic matron still clinging to him he sprawled to the floor. A violent oath escaped him. Panini's laugh filled the room.

"Aw, you are hurt-a, my Hippolyt-a," Antonica cried passionately.

The poet struggled to a sitting position and stared

about him wildly. The room was empty. Panini was gone!

On the closed door glittering in the half-dark as if scrawled in huge letters of fire was the address, 18 Beek Street, Brooklyn. As he stared, the message grew fainter and flickered out.

Antonica was now patting his face with insistent hands and, as if fascinated by the thought, repeating giddily:

"The whole-a bottle . . . you dreenk-a the whole-a bottle! Hippolyt-a, my God!"

VII

Hippolyt approached a small wooden house on which from a distance his eyes detected the magic numeral, 18. He was on Beek Street and in Brooklyn. Incidentally an increasing crowd of small boys as yet under laudable restraint had been silently following him for the last twenty minutes. For Hippolyt was as arresting a spectacle as the lowly eyes of Beek Street had beheld in many years. Moving in lordly fashion in and out among the ash cans he became a rallying point for wonder and excitement.

"It is only the poor," reflected Hippolyt, "who are capable of appreciating splendor. In fact, it is the poor who invented splendor—just as they in-

vented heavens. The kings and princes of the world and the splendors with which they surrounded themselves existed only for the eyes of the poor. In this poverty-stricken neighborhood I find my nobility at the same time increased and appreciated."

On entering the neighborhood, however, he had been somewhat surprised at the ugliness of the surroundings Amelia had chosen for herself.

"Her soul demands the gentle rebuke of ugliness," he mused. "Cruder and less lovely women are able to consider themselves beautiful only through the artifices of identifying themselves with superior surroundings. Amelia does not borrow her beauty from the obeisances of footmen."

As he drew rapidly nearer his destination this surprise and the meditation it stirred were forgotten in the happiness which extended his spirit. His body, wearied from the obligations Antonica had imposed on him, grew light once more. In a few moments he would be standing again before the woman he loved. Grandly indifferent to the growing agitation in his wake he broke into a run, holding his silk hat carefully in place with one gloved hand.

Mistaking this change of pace as a sudden and inhospitable effort to elude them, Hippolyt's hitherto reserved admirers numbering now almost twenty hurled themselves after him with challenging shouts. The chase was short and spirited. Unaware of the commotion behind him Hippolyt soared up the steps of 18 Beek Street and breathing hard stood banging hysterically on the door. The pur-

suit had come abruptly to a halt, for the house at which the magnificent fugitive was clamoring for admittance was the home of Policeman Michael O'Toole, a dignitary highly feared and respected in this neighborhood.

Hippolyt, recovering his breath, smiled philosophically at the pounding of his heart. This, he knew, was one of the fairest moments love had to offer—the moment in which dreams await with trembling arms the first caress of reality.

"Longing," he reflected, "is the divine and superior overture the soul plays for the Punch and Judy vaudeville of life. I shall always remember this last moment of desire with regret."

Nevertheless, he grew irritated at the failure of his blows to arouse an answer in the house. His knuckles sore with banging, he paused and peered through the glass panel of the door. He beheld nothing but himself reflected in the glass. Mollified by the image, he studied it for a space and then discovered a bell-button under his hand. He pressed this and was rewarded by a burst of ringing in the depths of the house. He easily heightened the efficacy of the alarm by rhythmically punching the bell as if he were playing a marching tune, attacking the bottom of the door simultaneously with his foot. At this point his admirers uttering awed cries of "jiggers" and "cheese it," retreated precipitously across the street. From this safe vantage they awaited the results of such unprecedented efforts to arouse the doughty O'Toole from his slumbers. For

O'Toole, devoting himself by night to the scourging of crime and disorder, had enforced in this turbulent neighborhood a zone of quiet between the hours of 8 A.M. and 4 P.M. It was now high noon.

A less obsessed nature than Hippolyt's would long ago have abandoned the hope that the house was occupied. Anger, however, rather than discouragement filled the lover's soul. He attributed the lack of response to the deliberate malice of the house's occupants, visualizing them while he attacked the door as listening coldly and with sneers to his efforts to attract their attention. Confronted by this fancied enmity Hippolyt's anger mounted. He began cursing loudly and to the amazement of the onlookers hurling himself in a frenzy on the door as if to break it down. Failing in this he belabored it furiously with his cane, fists, shoulders and feet. In the midst of this enterprising din his ear caught the sound of someone moving inside. He at once redoubled his efforts, filling the attentive and expectant neighborhood with commanding howls until the door suddenly flung open and a naked red-haired man with a turkish towel clutched to his middle appeared roaring at the top of his voice.

The O'Toole's rage blinded him for several profane moments to the unusual nature of his caller. Hippolyt, immediately on the opening of the door, had assumed an air of contemptuous reserve. Officer O'Toole broke off in the midst of his lurid threats and stared at the disturber of his rest.

"What the hell," he trailed off hoarsely and stood

blinking at the silk hat. The withering calm of his caller confused him.

"Was that you?" he demanded, "was that you making that noise?"

"I would like," Hippolyt replied coldly, "to speak to the Princess Amelia."

"What 'id ye say?" O'Toole retreating modestly into the dark of the hallway raised his voice. "Who you wanna see?"

"You heard me," Hippolyt answered.

"I didn't get the name," the O'Toole protested.

"Amelia," Hippolyt closed his eyes dreamily as he pronounced the enchanting word. Opening them he stared at his host and added indignantly: "You are practically naked. You will kindly cover your questionable charms before calling her. I will wait." He sighed and thrust his cane under his arm in order to remove his bright gloves.

"Say . . ." began Officer O'Toole. He paused. The awe which his first glimpse of Hippolyt had inspired was waning. He didn't have to take insults from anybody, silk hat or no silk hat.

"There ain't nobody here," he announced in a surly voice.

"Oh," said Hippolyt frowning, "she hasn't returned yet."

"Who the hell you talkin' about?" The O'Toole was losing his temper.

"Amelia," Hippolyt repeated ominously. "Do you wish me to spell it for you? A-m-e-l-i-a," he enunciated the letters with scorn.

"Aw, go on," the O'Toole interrupted. "There ain't nobody here by that name. You got the wrong house."

Hippolyt thrust his foot quickly over the threshold and thus, at the expense of a bruised toe prevented the slammed door from closing.

"Is this 18 Beek Street?" he cried.

"Yeah," the voice answered, "beat it. D'ye hear me? You got the wrong place . . ."

Hippolyt hurled himself unexpectedly forward. The O'Toole, unprepared for assault, was thrown off his feet, the door fetching him a violent clout on the head as it flung back. He lay temporarily stunned. Hippolyt burst into the hallway.

"I am Count Hippolyt Bruga," he shouted over the recumbent O'Toole. "Get up. And no more stalling. Get up, I tell you. Where is she? You're hiding her."

The municipal officer staggered to his feet, his hand still supporting his solitary drape and roared.

"Get out o' here, you murderin' bastard . . ."

"Amelia," Hippolyt shouted, dashing into the house, "Amelia!"

The crowd on the sidewalk was making way for a large, red-faced woman who, laden with bundles, had come bounding authoritatively across the street. This was Mrs. O'Toole returned from her marketing.

"Michael!" she cried, panting on the threshold. "Go get some clothes on. Shame on ye, talkin' to a gentleman lookin' like that . . ."

"I'll knock his God damn block off," the O'Toole roared.

"Put yer pants on first. Are ye mad?" his wife screamed and rushing forward she shoved him toward the stairs. "Now what do you want?" she turned upon Hippolyt who was standing glowering and silent behind her.

"He's lookin' for some dame," the O'Toole cried. "He come here breakin' down the house . . .Jest hold him till I come down."

"I am looking for a woman named Amelia whom this creature is hiding," Hippolyt raised his cane at the retreating O'Toole.

"Glory be to God," Mrs. O'Toole interrupted loudly.

"Panini is paying him," Hippolyt continued, his face contorted. "I knew it . . ."

"Michael! Michael!" Mrs. O'Toole screamed. "The gentleman's mad!"

"Me pants!" Officer O'Toole howled down. "Where th' hell'd ye put 'em? You're always hidin' 'em, God damn it!"

Hippolyt had seized the woman by the arm.

"Do you know a man named Panini, Enrico Panini?" he cried.

"No and I do not," Mrs. O'Toole shouted back. "Take ver hands off me. Michael!"

"Hold him," the voice roared back. "I'm comin'."

Hippolyt, releasing the woman, strode savagely into the front room, slashing the air with his cane.

"I knew it," he cried as the O'Toole appeared in the doorway, "he betrayed me. Panini lied."

He turned and stared unseeingly at the two figures watching him.

"The scoundrel!" he shouted. "Panini . . . I'll kill him!"

For an instant he stood rigid and quivering. Then with a rush which tumbled the O'Toole unexpectedly upon his rear, Hippolyt bolted for the door, leaped down the steps, colliding insensibly with the startled and gaping gallery, and raced down the street. Officer O'Toole, naked to the waist, appeared in the doorway.

"Hey, none o' that!" he shouted, his guardian instincts now fully aroused. "Stop him . . ."

But Hippolyt, flying over the pavements, had vanished around a corner from the eyes of the astonished neighborhood.

VIII

An hour later a cab turned wildly into Archer Street and came to a stop in front of an old-fashioned brownstone apartment building. Hippolyt sprang from its interior and ran toward the entrance.

Two thick-set men in loose-fitting clothes and heavy brogans who would have violated the platitudes of description had they been anything but

detectives seized him by the arms as he burst into the vestibule. In his rush Hippolyt had failed to observe that a number of people were gathered on the pavement idly contemplating the building upon which he was intent. Passion is a cloud which by limiting what we see increases our capacity for action.

One of the detectives was named Mullins. Although it was a full hour since he had eaten he was still reminiscently chewing a toothpick. The other detective was named Miller. He had discarded his toothpick in favor of the cigar which an ambitious newspaper reporter had forced upon him.

"Hey!" cried Mullins, "wait a minute, wait a minute! What's the rush?"

"Can't go in there. What'sa matter with you?" Miller demanded.

Thus unexpectedly checked in his purpose Hippolyt stood for a moment speechless and glaring at the two detectives. Whatever his state of mind, Hippolyt was able always to recognize detectives. Officers Mullins and Miller were accordingly surprised at the transformation which overcame the elegant gentleman in the silk hat whom they had arrested in full flight. All evidence of haste and excitement had precipitously left him.

"I wish," he was calm and a bit haughty, "to see Signor Panini."

Mullins was the first to recover from his astonishment.

"Any relation of his?" he inquired.

"That don't make no diff'rence, Jim." Officer

Miller was firm—"he'll have to get a permit if he wants to see him. Got a permit?" he added turning to Hippolyt.

"No," said Hippolyt and stood glaring once more. "What—what is he, a side show?" he demanded.

"What d'yu want to see this Panini fur?" Mullins regarded him coldly.

Hippolyt laughed. The mystery was solved. These were guards hired by the cowering Panini to protect him against Count Hippolyt Bruga.

"He was expecting me, eh?" he sneered, abandoning entirely his original plan of disarming the detectives.

"Was he?" Officer Miller echoed blandly, with a significant wink at his partner. The wink was not lost. Hippolyt drew himself up and regarded the two men with contempt.

"All the kidney-footed detectives in the world will not save him," he announced.

Officer Miller took a deep breath.

"Was he an enemy of yours?" he regarded the end of his cigar with great disinterest and signaled his partner, this time by a surreptitious poke of his elbow.

"Tell your cowardly master, Signor Panini," Hippolyt rolled out his second statement ominously, "that I came here to kill him. And that he will not escape me."

"Yeah," Officer Mullins stared. There was a pause.

"What's your name?" Officer Mullins finally inquired.

"Count Hippolyt Bruga," Hippolyt closed his eyes and exhibited his teeth in a grimace of rage. "You will tell him that Count Hippolyt Bruga called —to see him."

"What's he done to you?" Officer Miller attempted a confidential tone.

"That," replied Hippolyt, "is a secret between Signor Panini and myself."

"All right, Ed!" Officer Mullins cried suddenly.

Hippolyt, taken off his guard, struggled futilely in the smothering embrace of his two assailants. A blow on the side of the head stunned him. He slipped to the ground. A few minutes later he was being pulled up the steps, a pair of handcuffs on his wrists, his captors bearing his hat and cane.

Officers Mullins and Miller rapped loudly on the door of the second-floor apartment. It was opened by a tall, sad-looking man with a drooping black mustache and a cast in one eye which gave a far-away, abstracted look to that side of his dark face.

"What's the matter?" he inquired in a voice whose pessimism vindicated his peculiar resemblance to Edgar Allan Poe.

"We got a suspect, Lieutenant," Officer Mullins answered, hiding his excitement in gruff tones. His partner pushed the manacled Hippolyt into the room. Lieutenant McTavish regarded the ornate captive.

"Where'd you get him?" he asked.

"In front of the house," Officer Miller answered.

"Right while we was standing in the vestibule," his partner corroborated.

"What was he doing there?" Lieutenant McTavish turned his good eye on his subordinates.

"The murderer always returns to the scene of his crime," quoted Officer Miller darkly. "And he had on a silk hat. Here it is. The same one the milkman described."

He held it up, shaking it menacingly in Hippolyt's scowling face.

"He was pretendin'," Officer Mullins explained, somewhat put out by his superior's silence, "he was pretendin' he was breakin' in to take a crack at Panini."

"To kill him," Hippolyt coldly corrected the information.

"Somebody's killed him already," Lieutenant McTavish was pensive. "Didn't you know that? It's in the papers."

"I never read the newspapers," Hippolyt replied with the contempt for the Press which distinguishes a superior mind.

"He'll probably plead insanity," Officer Mullins uttered a loud aside to his partner.

"Sit down," Lieutenant McTavish sighed. "I want to talk to you."

He scratched the back of his head nervously Lieutenant McTavish was burdened with a reticent and indecisive nature. He was also a man of fine

sensibilities, a virtue which made it difficult for him to interrogate strangers.

"Maybe he was a member of some band pledged to murder Panini and he got here late," Officer Mullins spoke up, fetching a chair.

"Yeah, and some other member of the band got here ahead of him," his partner elaborated the theory hopefully.

"Take the bracelets off him," said Lieutenant McTavish, irritated by his subordinates' crude but ready minds.

The two detectives stepped forward and with reluctance removed the handcuffs. Hippolyt, motionless and frowning, ignored the action.

"Now," the Lieutenant resumed politely, "what's your name?"

"Count Hippolyt Bruga," Hippolyt answered stiffly.

"No account, you mean," Officer Mullins exclaimed, the lighter side of his nature momentarily getting the better of him.

"Let's show him the body," Officer Miller added, annoyed by his partner's levity. "I got'n idea."

McTavish ignored the suggestion.

"What made you want to kill Panini," he continued with a disconsolate, far-away stare at the nobleman.

Hippolyt sprang unexpectedly to his feet.

"This farce," he announced, pointing an accusing finger at McTavish, "has gone far enough. Tell Signor Panini that his clumsy efforts to annoy me are

delicately amusing." He scowled grimly at the Lieutenant.

"Sit down," murmured McTavish. "Panini is dead. He was murdered sometime between the hours of 5 and 8 A.M. I would hardly call it a farce."

"No?" Hippolyt interrupted indignantly, "why not?"

"His body," continued McTavish, "was found inside a locked trunk, bound, gagged and strangled."

"That's a lie," Hippolyt was calm.

"I wish it was," said McTavish.

"Don't pay any attention to him, Chief," warned Officer Mullins. "He's just tryin' to alibi himself."

"How's he gonna explain about the silk hat?" Officer Miller demanded. "Come on," he seized Hippolyt's shoulder, "come clean. The more yu tell the easier it'll be fur yu in the end, get me?"

McTavish frowned at his zealous subordinates and waved them away. He lighted a pipe.

Hippolyt brushed his shoulder solicitously with his hand. Then he wrinkled his forehead.

"So he's dead," he repeated.

McTavish nodded.

"In a trunk," pursued Hippolyt. "That's a good place for him."

He beamed viciously around the room.

"Who discovered his worthless corpse?"

The nobleman's peculiar attitude seemed lost upon McTavish. He answered politely:

"The men who were moving the trunks to the

warehouse this morning." After a pause he added with a sigh, "He shot off a gun."

"Who shot off a gun?" Hippolyt demanded.

"Panini," McTavish pursued, knitting his brows. "He shot off a gun in the trunk."

"You mean," Hippolyt corrected him coldly, "that Signor Panini shot himself in a trunk."

"No," said McTavish, "he was dead when he fired the shot. That's the trouble. He'd been dead for at least three hours."

He studied Hippolyt dejectedly.

"The reason I'm telling you this," he went on, "is because I don't think you had anything to do with it. Despite your silk hat. Did you kill him?" he added hopefully. "You might as well confess if you did. It'll save us all a lot of trouble."

"Nothing," Hippolyt replied promptly, "would please me more than to have killed Signor Panini. Particularly to have strangled him. Unfortunately, I am innocent." He scowled at the three men.

"I see," said McTavish politely, and scratched his head. "The movers," he went on in a listless voice, "were taking the trunks away to the warehouse. Just as they were lifting the third trunk there was an explosion. A muffled explosion," he added thoughtfully, "and the smoke started coming out of a bullet hole."

"I am not interested in the crude details of Signor Panini's death," Hippolyt interposed and fell to looking with unconcern out of the window.

"They called a policeman," McTavish continued

as if unable to drop the subject, "and broke open the trunk. And there he was, bent up inside and holding the smoking revolver in his hand. And he'd been dead for three hours. Dr. Smith established that. That's what I can't understand. Have you any ideas offhand on the subject?" he appealed to Hippolyt. "You see, he was dead when he was put in the trunk."

"He was a magician, you know," Officer Mullins suggested.

"The point is," McTavish went on, unhappily, "that just as the body is being carted away to be put in an air-tight warehouse vault where it would never be found, it shoots off a gun and signals to the movers."

"It's a coincidence, that's all," Officer Miller shook his head. "I wouldn't bother about that now, Chief."

"I tell you," Officer Mullins exclaimed. "I got a theory that the gun was shot off by a string operated from the outside by somebody. He was a magician and prob'ly had a assistant. They always got assistants," he concluded lamely.

"Go outside," McTavish sighed, "and don't let anybody in, especially those damn newspapermen. I want to think. And don't bring in any more suspects."

"All right," said Officer Miller, "what about him?" he jerked his finger toward the captive.

"I don't know," said McTavish, "leave him here, I suppose. Go on."

A curious-looking man emerged from another

room. He was dressed in a brown suit and had a medieval face—large, womanish eyes, long, pointed nose and luxurious brown hair that fell below his ears. He wore also what is called an artist's bow-tie. He had arrived at the apartment a half hour ago and introduced himself as the Marvelous Sarastro, a practitioner of the black art. McTavish impressed by his curious appearance and equally strange assurance had permitted him to examine the premises.

"It is Panini," he announced now, gracefully dusting his hands. "We need have no more doubts about that. The body is that of Enrico Panini."

He turned to Dr. Smith, the coroner's physician —a thin, gray-haired and ineffectual-looking man— who had appeared behind him.

"Did I prove it or not?" he inquired unctuously.

"Who'd you think it was?" McTavish was irritated, "the King of Siam?"

"Yes," the Marvelous Sarastro smiled tolerantly. "Panini was a greater and stranger man than you imagine. Than the world imagines." He looked around and bowed as if to an audience. "Just because," he went on soothingly, "a body is found in a trunk that looks like Panini, then it must be Panini! Bah! In this case, gentlemen, we must be prepared for anything. Even the King of Siam." He paused and added, "Who is this man?" Approaching Hippolyt he stared intently into his face and muttered:

"No. He is too stout. Panini is thinner. Unless . . ." His hands darted to Hippolyt and began

squeezing at his stomach. "No, he is not padded," he announced. Hippolyt stepped back with an oath. McTavish indicated him with a listless finger.

"He's an enemy of Panini," he said. "Maybe he can tell us something important. He came here a few minutes ago to . . .to . . ."

"To kill him," Hippolyt refused to be edited.

"An enemy! Good," Sarastro smiled and bowed lightly to Hippolyt. Not to be outdone the poet bent himself double in a superior salaam.

"I am Sarastro," the medieval face went on, "the Marvelous Sarastro. You have heard of me."

"No," said Hippolyt curtly, after he had straightened.

"Ah, that is too bad," Sarastro regarded him with polite incredulity. "Stop, however, think!" He fixed Hippolyt's attention with a forefinger held before his nose. "Sarastro the Wizard. Is he Man or Demon? You have not heard? Ah, but you have seen me perform of course."

"No," Hippolyt answered, with indignation.

"What is your name, please," the Marvelous One asked coldly.

"I am Count Hippolyt Bruga," Hippolyt pronounced the titled name as always, with a note of languor.

"Bruga . . . Bruga? Is that not a Polish name, Excellenz?" the Wizard stared. Then he seized Hippolyt's hand and added passionately:

"You are a Polish nobleman. Good. We are brothers. I am also a Pole. During the war, I

went back to Poland. I gave my genius, my magic to my people—without cost."

He broke off into a flow of Polish during which Hippolyt listened aloofly. When Sarastro had finished his declaration of patriotism, His Excellenz smiled disdainfully and replied:

"When I am in America I speak English, Mr. Sarastro."

"I, too, I speak English," the Wizard agreed proudly. "I speak English as well as Polish. I speak also French, German, Russian and Italian. I am at home in all the languages, Excellenz."

"Your accomplishments," Hippolyt insisted, "do not interest me."

Sarastro appeared crestfallen.

"Like you," he murmured, "I am an enemy of Panini. For seven years I planned to kill him. I tell the Lieutenant when I come in, 'Ha! Panini is dead. Good. He was the devil himself.'"

He turned to the dejected McTavish for corroboration.

"Did I not say that when I came in?" he demanded.

McTavish nodded.

"I wish to see the body of Signor Panini!" Hippolyt exclaimed, glowering at the room. "I don't believe he is dead."

"Neither do I!" Sarastro seized his hand and shook it vehemently. "What do I say, Lieutenant? I say, 'No, it is not Panini. It is someone else. The mysterious gun in the dead man's hand which signals

his presence to the police, what is that but a trick of Panini's?' Yes, Panini is the devil. He has played us a trick. He has disguised someone to look like him and then murdered that person."

"You just identified the body," Dr. Smith remarked mildly.

"Don't interrupt him," McTavish removed his pipe and scowled.

"Yes," Sarastro smiled, "a minute ago I see Panini dead. But to me that is of no significance. Do you know, my good doctor, the miracles which are possible to the Cabalist, to the student of the Occult? Ah, you do not believe. You smile. But Sarastro does not smile. Gentlemen, I am no fool. Come, Excellenz, we will look again."

Hippolyt, frowning, followed him into the bedroom. Stretched on the bed fully clothed lay Panini. The white face no longer held a smile. Its once charming features were stiffened in an expression of anguish.

"So," muttered Hippolyt, "he escaped me."

"Me, too," Sarastro breathed softly beside him.

Dr. Smith, who had entered the bedroom, announced himself with an artificial cough.

"I have read your works," he remarked, smiling embarrassedly at the poet.

Hippolyt, still studying the corpse, began, as always in the presence of any literary admirer, to bristle with an air of insult and derision.

"You hardly look like a man consumed with a love for poetry," he replied belligerently.

"I'm just a doctor," Dr. Smith agreed modestly. He belonged to that naïve species of professional man who cringes happily in the presence of authors. "I read your last book, 'Microscopic Sommersalts,' wasn't it?" he added diffidently.

"The titles of my books are not news to me," Hippolyt replied.

Dr. Smith, during his busy career as coroner's physician, had met several authors and even poets. He had, in fact, dissected two of the latter whom the police had found under mysterious circumstances, to determine whether there was poison in their stomachs. On both occasions Dr. Smith had felt an unscientific sense of violation while engaged in his work, as if in opening a poet's body one was trespassing upon a sanctuary. Nevertheless he had eagerly availed himself of this opportunity of familiarizing himself with the interior of a superior being, and the thoroughness of his autopsies in both cases had somewhat startled the police. But, his investigations had, from a spiritual point of view, benefited him little. Despite the knowledge he had derived from them, literary men remained for him a race apart. He continued to regard them as an aloof and oracular species, the inhabitants of a glittering and ennobling sphere called Art.

Never before, however, had he encountered one who so perfectly fulfilled his treasured image of a literary genius as Bruga. He hesitated nervously, endeavoring to heighten his courage sufficiently to inform the poet that he, too, wrote, but not very

well, of course, and merely as relaxation. Instead, he stammered ineptly:

"Do you write whenever you want to, Count Bruga, or only when you are in the mood?"

Hippolyt, who had been waiting gloatingly for his victim's next query, replied with heavy sarcasm:

"The best time to write is when there are no fools present," and walked happily out of the room. Dr. Smith, with an appreciative and respectful laugh at this information, followed Sarastro in his wake.

Lieutenant McTavish had not altered in their absence. He was still smoking dejectedly. He greeted Dr. Smith with a grunt.

"Hello," he said. "Sit down. There's nothing to do for a while. Anyway until we hear from Sergeant Strossneider."

Hippolyt folded his arms on his chest.

"Amelia," he murmured, and a smile, vague and sorrowful, lighted his face. He stood lost in dreams. McTavish regarded him with mild surprise and then turned irritably toward Sarastro. The Marvelous One was busy examining the room on his hands and knees. McTavish watched him for a space and then, shrugging his shoulders, addressed the doctor:

"I don't like mysteries," he said. "I never was cut out to be a detective. You know, my first idea was to be an inventor. It's a much better profession, but it doesn't pay. Unless you're lucky. Out of eighteen thousand inventions patented every month only three can be said to bring in a profit to their inventors." He lighted his pipe and sighed.

"And besides," he went on pointing at Sarastro and speaking in a listless voice, "look at what a detective has to do. Search for clues. I've never been able to do it. So far as I'm concerned this whole Panini thing seems completely mad and not a little absurd. Particularly about the gun in the trunk. That's the way all mysteries strike me. I can never make head or tail out of them."

Officer Miller shook his head as if sympathizing with his chief's attitude.

"Funny things will happen," he remarked soothingly. "Do you remember the Blackie Webb case?"

"You mean that half-breed?" Officer Mullins interposed, brightening.

"Yeah," his partner agreed, "that's the one. He was a half-breed Indian. Now there was a funny case if there ever was one. He was doing time in the county jail for wife beating. Then one night he breaks jail and escapes unbeknownst to anybody and sneaks into his home and kills his wife. He cut her to smithereens. And then he sneaks back to the jail and gets back into his cell again and nobody knows he was even out of it."

"The funny part of it was," Officer Mullins reminded him, "that the crime was committed right over the police station. The eighth precinct, too."

"Yeah," Officer Miller smiled. "I was coming to that. That's where they lived on account of Mrs. Webb being scared of her husband. So he come there anyway after sneaking out of the jail and cut her to smithereens and sneaked back again and no-

body knowed who done it. There was a trail of blood right past the Captain's office, too."

Dr. Smith surprised by this unexpected information cleared his throat and inquired politely:

"How did you find out?"

"Oh," Officer Miller replied, "that turned out easy. This half-breed finished doing time, and was let out on good behavior and he come back and lived right over the station like before. And he used to get drunk in the saloons around there and tell everybody how he fooled the police and how smart he was. You know, bragged his head off to every bartender in the district. So after a while we got wind of it and arrested him and he was electrocuted."

"That ain't as funny as the Barnes case," Officer Mullins struck a judicious and reminiscent attitude. "Do you happen to remember that, Dr. Smith? About fourteen years ago?"

"No, I don't think I do," Dr. Smith sighed; "did he say anything when he was electrocuted?"

"Who, this Barnes?" Officer Mullins went on. "Well——"

"No, I mean this other man, the half-breed," Dr. Smith explained.

"Oh, no," Officer Miller smiled a bit patronizingly, "they never say very much. You know, just the usual thing. He died game, too."

"Barnes didn't," Officer Mullins sneered. "Yelled like a dog."

Dr. Smith removed his glasses slowly and inquired with an attempt at calm;

"Who was Barnes?"

"That was out in Brooklyn," Lieutenant McTavish ventured gloomily.

"Yeah," Officer Mullins agreed. "Brooklyn, 1911. I was walking beat. This fellow Barnes was married to a woman he didn't like. So he killed her one day and got rid of her body in a furnace. Then he took what was left after the furnace got through with her and put it in a suitcase and dumped it in the river. All except the skull. He kept the skull and made a tobacco jar out of it, with hinges and everything. You know, one of those jars like you see."

"He painted it all over," Officer Mullins went on, "and he shellacked it and used to keep it on his table in the parlor."

Here Dr. Smith sat up with a start.

"Good Lord!" he murmured, "in the parlor!"

"Yeah," Officer Mullins nodded, "he moved into another district after the crime and nobody knew he'd been married. This Mrs. Barnes didn't have any relatives. She'd come from some place in Scotland and was only married a couple of months. But he took a dislike to her anyway and killed her right off. Well, you'd figure there was a crime nobody could solve, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," said Dr. Smith, "I would."

"Well, it was easy," Officer Mullins smiled with modesty. "It took a year, but one night this Barnes was sitting in his parlor with a man named Ed Considine who worked in the same office with him and this fella Considine noticed the tobacco jar and

looked at it and said it was a pretty good imitation and looked like a real skull. He said he'd like to get one like it for his den. So Barnes laughed and told him to quit his kiddin' about it being a good imitation and claimed it was a genuine skull. Well, this Considine was a stubborn, smart-aleck sort of a guy and they got into an argument over it and Barnes lost his temper and began calling this Considine names. And Considine got sore, too; you know how fellas get to fighting."

"Yeah," Officer Miller interjected, "the worst murder I ever knew come out of a argument in a poker game whether the guy had anteed or not and he was cut to ribbons before the argument was over."

"That's how it was," went on Officer Mullins, "they got to denouncin' each other and Considine said that if that was a real skull he'd eat it. And then Barnes laughed and hollered, 'All right, you God damn cannibal. Go on and eat it then. It's my wife. That's how much you know about skulls, you big fourflusher.'"

"Well, when Considine got home that night and cooled off from the insults he got to thinkin' over what this Barnes had kept yellin' about being able to prove it was a genuine skull and how it was his wife's. So, being still sore over the whole thing, this Considine dropped and told Captain Newcomer of the 4th Precinct. And we went out and arrested Barnes. After about a week he broke down and confessed all. I lost track of the case but he was electrocuted after I was moved to the seventeenth precinct.

But anyway he won the argument about it being a real skull."

"A lot of good it did him," Officer Miller laughed meaningly.

"You've solved a lot of cases," Dr. Smith contradicted politely, his eyes fixed on the dreamy, smiling face of the literary genius.

Lieutenant McTavish sneered.

"I haven't ever solved a case in my life," he replied irritably. "I've found out if you sit still like this and don't do anything or get yourself upset looking for clues—like that," he broke off and pointed indignantly to Sarastro, "that if you sit still," he went on, "something usually happens. Lots of times people have walked in on me and told me where the criminal lived and even what time he would be home. And when I've gone out and found him the papers always come out and announce, 'Police Solve Baffling Mystery.'"

McTavish glanced at the smiling Hippolyt as if expecting an inconveniencing reply.

"He's dreaming," murmured Dr. Smith, as if he were an interpreter of superior soul-states; "do you know who he is?"

"No, I don't," McTavish answered, "and I don't want to. There's always a lot of nuts come around when a crime's been committed. It sort of attracts them. That reminds me," he lowered his voice confidentially, "Mrs. McTavish'll be all worked up from reading the newspapers when I get home. She'll expect some inside theories. I haven't any.

Damn it, I never have any theories. I don't know why I stick on the force."

Dr. Smith removed his awed attention from the genius long enough to answer.

"You're one of the best men we've got, Lieutenant."

"I'm no good," McTavish persisted stubbornly. "I'm a failure in life. In addition to that I'm antisocial. I don't see any sense in wasting a lot of time and money trying to catch criminals. If you leave them alone they usually reform of their own accord when they get older."

Sarastro had ceased crawling. He stood up and shook his hair back.

"There has been a struggle in this room," he announced. "The dust tells a story. A terrific struggle, gentlemen."

"What of it?" McTavish snapped. "It's nothing unusual if there was a fight, seeing somebody got killed."

"Perhaps," Dr. Smith spoke up nervously, "Count Bruga has some theories about the matter. What do you think of the mystery?" he addressed the genius with an appealing smile.

"Mystery," answered Hippolyt promptly, "is a sleeping platitude."

"I don't know what you mean by that," McTavish turned to him judiciously; "if you mean that just because a thing is mysterious it's no sign that it isn't stupid, I agree with you."

"I mean," Hippolyt said coldly, "that death is a monotonous disguise which does not interest me."

"It's the newspapers that kick up the most row about these things," McTavish wheeled his good eye upon Sarastro; "wait till you read what they don't say about the gun going off in the trunk."

"I have other ways of spending my time," Hippolyt sneered, "than reading what the newspapers have to say about anything."

"I suppose," Dr. Smith beamed, "that writing poetry takes longer than just prose. Even if you're a poet."

"I see no reason," Hippolyt scowled at him, "for turning this absurd situation into a discussion of poetry."

"I never read poetry," McTavish muttered under his breath, with the hope of being overheard by this irritating suspect. His good eye had been fastened on a distant part of the room. "What's that in the fireplace there? Did you look at that, Sarastro?"

The Marvelous One turned and went down on his hands and knees again.

"Ashes," he replied, with enthusiasm.

"They must be recent," McTavish spoke listlessly, "because there was a heavy wind last night. It would have disturbed them. Unless the chimney is shut off."

Sarastro thrust his arm into the flue. His soot-blackened hand emerged holding a piece of paper.

"Ah," he cried, "a half-burned letter. I can read

a few words. One moment." He blew carefully on the paper.

"It's probably a bill for the rent," McTavish frowned. Sarastro began reading.

" 'Beloved Enrico, you are my happiness. I love you more than him.' The rest," he broke off, "I cannot make out. It is burned."

Hippolyt was glaring at him.

"Let me see that letter," he demanded.

"Excellenz, careful!" Sarastro protested, "you will spoil it."

"Isn't there a signature or something?" McTavish inquired petulantly.

"Ah, yes," Sarastro exclaimed, "here on the other side it is signed, 'Adoringly, Amelia.' "

At the name, Hippolyt, who had been bending over the paper, straightened as if under a blow.

"Where?" he cried. "Where does it say that?"

"Here, you can read." Sarastro held the letter to him. Hippolyt stared at the half-legible signature and after a moment closed his eyes. Then without a sound he sank into the chair.

Sarastro whispered softly over him:

"Do you know a woman named Amelia, Excellenz?"

"No," replied Hoppolyt sepulchrally; "she is dead."

"Hm, what's her last name?" McTavish looked at him, with interest.

"Her name was Amelia," Hippolyt's tone was

rhythmic and aloof: "and she is dead. There is nothing one may say of the dead."

"Where there is a love letter, there is a track," Sarastro remarked; "the vibrations come together." He paused abruptly and bit his lip. "I was dreaming," he added, running his hand gently across his forehead and smiling at the Lieutenant. "Pay no attention."

McTavish held out his hand for the letter.

"I wish we hadn't found it," he sighed; "it will only excite the newspapers that much more."

Sarastro murmured solicitously over the clouded poet.

"You loved this woman, Excellenz?"

"Love," Hippolyt replied hoarsely, "is a delicate mist upon which fools trace their dreams."

"Where does she live?" McTavish asked.

The poet opened his eyes and regarded him viciously. Then he laughed.

"Eighteen Beek Street, Brooklyn," he answered, and relapsed at once into his expressionless stare at the carpet. McTavish went to the window and opened it.

"Mullins!" he called.

"There's a young gentleman here wantsa see you," Mullins cried back from the pavement, "and should I give the newspaper boys the name of your suspect?"

"No," McTavish answered; "come up here right away."

"Panini," Sarastro was saying, "did not count upon

me. He forgot there was one as clever as himself."

"Why pick on Panini?" McTavish interrupted, returning from the window, "he's dead."

"Dead or not," the Marvelous One smiled tolerantly at the rebuke, "it is Panini who is at the bottom of everything. He is not a man but a devil. There were things he could do—ah! Yes, if the door opened this moment and who comes in but Panini himself, I am not surprised, gentlemen. I do not wish to seem impolite, my dear friends, but you—the police—know nothing of the forces about us." He described the halves of a circle slowly before his eyes.

"We've got to be practical," Lieutenant McTavish frowned. "First point, it couldn't have been a woman who did it." He consulted a notebook taken from his pocket and went on: "The Milkman says he saw a man in a silk hat. That was about 4:30. He peeked in the window while passing with the milk and this man in the silk hat looked out at him. Then he saw the same man running away from the house down the alley. Of course, that's only one milkman's statement."

He looked up at his listeners and with a shrug wrote the name "Amelia" beneath the notes on what the milkman had seen and said. The door opened.

"The best thing to do is to wait for Sergeant Strossneider," McTavish mumbled. Mullins and Miller entered, both smoking large cigars. Behind them appeared an athletic and foppish-looking youth, with a sprightly varsity face.

"This is the young gentleman that wants to see you," began Mullins. "He's a detective."

"I don't want to see any detectives," McTavish raised his voice. "What's the idea of bringing detectives up here?"

"My name is Chittering. Rufus Chittering, Jr.," the youth interrupted and smiled winningly. He stepped forward with his hand out-thrust. "Lieutenant McTavish, I believe."

"He's Rufus Chittering's son," Officer Miller was unable to keep the awe out of his voice.

"Oh," said McTavish, and stared sheepishly at the youth; "the one who set up as a detective."

"Quite right, Chief," beamed Rufus Jr. McTavish cleared his throat.

"Sit down," he suggested. "I read about you in the newspapers. I suppose you're interested in this case."

"I should say I am," began Rufus Jr., but McTavish interrupted him.

"I can't figure out how any young man with your —with your connections would want to be a detective."

"Oh, it's the lure of the thing," Rufus Jr. answered exuberantly. "Mystery—that's where I live. I've got a knack for it, I guess."

The fact that he was in the presence of the largest and most sensational fortune in New York—perhaps the entire United States—had brought a change into Lieutenant McTavish's manner. He looked less pessimistic and assumed the air of false social gayety

with which he usually greeted his wife's relatives.

"I'm afraid there's nothing for you to do in this case," he went on apologetically.

"Oh, have you solved the mystery?" Rufus Jr. inquired, his voice rich with disappointment.

"Well, not exactly," confessed McTavish, "but . . ."

"He's got some important information," Officer Miller ventured, and his partner shook his head impressively in corroboration. In the presence of this golden scion these two doughty arms of the law had undergone, no less than their superior, a remarkable change. They stood gaping and solicitous as if they had been transformed suddenly into a pair of Chittering footmen.

"How do you do," the Marvelous Sarastro stepped forward. "Nobody has introduced me, so I introduce myself."

"That's all right," Rufus Jr. beamed his social assurance.

"I am Sarastro the magician," Sarastro continued; "they call me, you know, of course, 'The Marvelous Sarastro.' "

"Oh, yes, yes," Rufus Jr. was delighted. "I thought I recognized you. How do you do."

He shook hands as if intent upon loosening the Marvelous One's forearm from its socket.

"You've got a strong grip," he exclaimed in surprise.

"Looks are often deceiving," Sarastro smiled broadly. "I am unusually strong for my size. I

can lift weights that a man much bigger than myself cannot budge. In my profession it is necessary to be strong, clever, quick-witted and more intelligent than everybody else. And besides," he concluded, with a modest roll of his large eyes, "there are forces . . ."

"I want one of you to go somewhere," McTavish turned to his subordinates with annoyance. "What's that address, Count?" he pursued, "where that woman lives."

Hippolyt removed his eyes from the carpet.

"Eighteen Beek Street, Brooklyn," he sneered; "ask for Amelia."

"Amelia!" Rufus Jr. repeated in astonishment.

"Yes, Amelia," Hippolyt snarled. "Ask for her. Go on."

"Go on," McTavish gestured the two men to the door, "and call me up. I'll either be here or at the station. Or maybe if I have any luck I'll be home."

Officers Mullins and Miller stepped forward and extended their hands to Rufus Chittering, Jr.

"Hope we see you again," said Officer Mullins in an unnatural voice.

"Look us up if you want anything," Officer Miller seconded his partner.

"You bet your life I will," Rufus Jr. beamed loyally. He was proud of his ability to make instantaneous friendships.

"I suppose you have some clues," Lieutenant McTavish remarked, as the detectives made their exit.

"What's her name?" Rufus Jr. exclaimed.

"Amelia. That's what I came to tell you about. I shadowed her last week."

"What for?" McTavish sat down. Despite the presence of the vast fortune he disliked standing on his feet.

"I was hired by her husband," Rufus Jr. explained. "My first case just after my story was in the papers. I've had several good ones since," he added professionally.

Hippolyt regarded him for a pregnant moment.

"Who," he demanded slowly; "who hired you to shadow Amelia?"

"Her husband," Rufus Jr. smiled inquisitively at the stranger.

"That's a lie!" Hippolyt thrust his face abruptly into the scion's. Rufus Jr., taken aback by this unexpected lack of friendliness, frowned.

"Who is this person?" he asked.

"I am Count Hippolyt Bruga," Hippolyt answered grandly and viciously, "and you are a notoriety-seeking liar."

Rufus Jr. stood up, raised his shoulders and tugged at his belt, looking very much like a football player about to kick off.

"Well," he said, "I'm not used to being called a liar by such a bogus-looking ape as you."

McTavish pulled the nobleman back into the chair with an annoyed tug at his Prince-Albert.

"Sit down," he grunted peevishly, "this is no saloon. Go on," he turned apologetically to the famous fortune. But Rufus Jr. found it difficult

to recover the thread of his thought. The unmannerly outburst he had just experienced had upset him. He was not accustomed to indignation in others, for it had been his good fortune during the twenty years of his life to inspire in people an obsequious friendliness.

"I was saying," he continued coldly, "that this woman's husband hired me to shadow her."

Hippolyt snorted and after a black stare at the Chittering Millions, suddenly covered his face with his hands. Mollified by this mysterious pantomime, Rufus Jr. went on.

"His name is Oliver Winterbottom. He's a professor."

"Ah," Sarastro interrupted, "of the Black Art, it is possible?"

Rufus Jr. shook his head.

"Latin," he answered. "He was jealous and suspected his wife of having, you know, relations with Panini. So I shadowed her."

"That's very interesting," murmured McTavish. "What kind of a looking woman was she?"

"Some baby!" Rufus Jr. exclaimed; "ooh!"

Hippolyt groaned from behind his hands.

"I picked up the subject as she was leaving her apartment," Rufus Jr. continued, "and shadowed her right to this house. She went inside and I took up my post across the street. Then I saw her come to the window. Panini was standing beside her, in a dressing gown. He put his arm around her and they kissed. Then she pulled down the blind."

Hippolyt was on his feet.

"Where does she live?" he inquired hoarsely.

Rufus Jr. ignored him and resumed. "When I reported this to the professor, her husband, you know, he went crazy . . . he . . ."

"Where does she live?" Hippolyt shouted and seized the scion by the arm. The door opened and a stout, genial-looking man with an old-fashioned beer-garden mustache entered.

"Hello, Sergeant," McTavish greeted him. "Just a minute," he smiled at the young detective. "Sit down," he added, waving Hippolyt back with his hand.

"Well, Lieutenant," Sergeant Strossneider rubbed his hands together. "We found a lot. Everything was in his room at the hotel where he was stopping. There's a woman in the case."

"Love letters?" Lieutenant McTavish inquired pensively.

"A whole drawerful," the Sergeant grunted with satisfaction, "all from a woman named Amelia. And, wait a minute, a couple of passports made out to Panini and his wife, Amelia Panini. Here they are. See, that's her picture."

"Yes," cried Rufus excitedly, "that's the one. Mrs. Winterbottom."

"And we found a trunk full of clothes at the Cunard pier, woman's clothes," Sergeant Strossneider continued his report; "they were going on the *Aquitania*. That leaves this noon. Had a stateroom reserved on it. It's a love triangle."

"Winterbottom killed him," Rufus Jr. exclaimed. "Come on, Chief, my car's outside."

"We'd better stop and pick up a stenographer?" McTavish paused thoughtfully, "and do some questioning around the neighborhood."

"I'll kill her!" Hippolyt was muttering beside him.

"If you're not going to behave yourself, you can't go along." McTavish turned petulantly.

"I'll behave myself—perfectly." Hippolyt answered grimly.

"Where's that magician?" Rufus Jr. looked around from the door.

"He was here a minute ago," Dr. Smith ventured.

"Mr. Sarastro!" McTavish called. There was no answer. "Well, I guess he must of gone downstairs," he muttered. "Come on."

In front of the house after a brief consultation with Officer Mullins, the Lieutenant frowned.

"We haven't any time to waste looking for that nut," he announced, moving toward the magnificent automobile at the curb. The car pulled away without Sarastro. Sitting in the rear between Dr. Smith and Lieutenant McTavish, Hippolyt kept his eyes savagely on the back of Rufus Jr.'s head.

"Very interesting, isn't it?" Dr. Smith smiled hopefully at the genius.

"To you," Hippolyt answered coldly.

IX

Amelia Winterbottom was a moist, blonde, plump and estimable young matron, who through an evil accident of the flesh jiggled lasciviously when in motion. Destined by nature to inspire memories of those corrupt and flabby-legged nymphs who, in the days before the introduction of chastity into heaven, ornamented the couches of the gods, Mrs. Winterbottom lived, perversely, a life of naïve and unassailable virtues.

She had, out of a childish awe of erudition, married, at the age of twenty-four, an undersized and irascible Latin professor with a frostbitten nose and a tendency toward baldness. In doing this Amelia had provided herself with a mate who would not only respect, but increase her repressions, which is perhaps as logical a function for matrimony as any.

Among the more facetious of the exclusive young women who attended the seminary known as Birdview, where he labored in the dissemination of a lost language, Mr. Winterbottom was always referred to as a cold, stern man. The diagnosis was sketchy, but pertinent. Very likely it was also scientific.

There are to be found occasionally men who appear to have been introduced into the world for no other purpose than to serve as a natural rebuke

to the coarseness and animalism of life. They are cold and righteous not by choice, but seemingly because they were born with thin noses and blue lips. Usually they make up for their hatred of life by the stern and critical admiration they manage, mysteriously enough, to hold for themselves.

Mr. Winterbottom was of this enviable genus. He loathed all vices and abominated exaggerations. He was unable to bear contradiction, and, indeed, regarded people who differed from him on even minor points as given to sacrilege and blasphemy. Also he looked upon enthusiasm as unseemly and was careful when calling attention to his superiorities to assume a firm but none the less modest tone. Further, he had a horror of ugliness and Mr. Winterbottom's notion of ugliness was a sweeping one. It embraced skyscrapers, rouge, traffic, modern music, industrialism, modern dancing, modern literature and art, all politics and all strangers.

Once a week Mr. Winterbottom attended a Presbyterian church and laid aside his customary restraints long enough to whoop with righteousness in the presence of a God who he conceded shared all his perfections. In short, Mr. Winterbottom, was a man who, having devoted himself since his youth to the study of philosophy, had matured at thirty-eight into a cantankerous and intolerant citizen, with an unreasonable attitude toward life, which he attributed, sonorously, to his Moral Principles.

Nevertheless, the home life of the Winterbottoms was a matter to which argumentative Puritans might

have pointed with pride. It was a quiet, peaceful home in which the very furniture seemed to stand in awe of the Winterbottoms. There were hooked rugs, cane-bottomed chairs, Colonial cupboards, George Washington beds, Leigh Hunt etchings and bedroom mottoes. People who visited the Winterbottoms always felt inspired by their surroundings to speak in low voices and assume very mannerly attitudes.

As for Mrs. Winterbottom, after five years of marriage, she still fluttered about her house with the furtive and idolatrous air of a bride. In her innocence she regarded her husband as the intellectual and physical triumph of his sex and like so many wives, who willfully deny themselves standards of comparison, she accepted his chill and infrequent embraces as the giddy limits of manhood. No less than her husband, she considered their home, their relations, their friends, and, in fact, everything which distinguished their uneventful lives as ideal.

Nature, blatant and frenzied and unable to pause a moment for the perfecting of its handiwork, adopts this ruse for the palming off of its second-rate product —it surrounds the mating instinct with delusions and insanities which enable even little Latin professors with thin noses and blue lips to be mistaken for lusty Abelards and shining Apollos. Mrs. Winterbottom, or perhaps Mrs. Winterbottom's repressions, were never so happy as when she was in her mild, dreamy manner boasting of her husband.

"Oliver," she would say, in a voice suggestive of lascivious secrets, "never allows me to read such

books. He doesn't think they are fit for a woman to know." Mrs. Winterbottom preferred to remain in ignorance of the ugly facts of life for the same reason perhaps that she would have preferred not going out in the rain unless she owned an umbrella. And again, "Oliver simply can't endure the so-called modern styles in women's clothes. I quite agree with him. I think a woman looks positively indecent in those short dresses."

Mrs. Winterbottom's own indecency was not a matter of intention and therefore cannot honestly be held against her. It was merely unfortunate (which is a considerate way of looking at the matter) that Mrs. Winterbottom should have reminded one so much of the corrupt nymphs of antiquity while giving utterance to such unfleshly and Christian thoughts. Purity, indeed, had never blundered into so erotically-fashioned a temple as Mrs. Winterbottom. The soft, yielding curves of her body were engaged in a continuous and provocative pantomime which contributed a certain notorious air to her chastity. Her gentle, doll-like face, peering out between the luxurious curtains of her hair, seemed less a face than an intimate glimpse of body. The general impression, in fact, achieved by Mrs. Winterbottom was that a stupid little girl had been imperfectly transformed into a full-blown Aphrodite or, what was more depressing, that a full-blown Aphrodite had been imperfectly transformed into a stupid little girl.

This impression was not, however, shared by Mr. Winterbottom. He considered his wife a submissive

and saintly example of the finest womanhood—which, considering that she took pains to reflect only his thoughts and desires, was only natural. When he looked at her, which was not often, he beheld only a placid testimonial to his virtues—a thorough and flattering Winterbottom. The thought that she might from any point of view be considered a sensually-stimulating creature would have outraged him as deeply as the charge that he himself was a blasphemer and a whoremonger.

Mr. Winterbottom entered his study this Saturday afternoon to correct the Latin themes, over which his pupils had toiled during the week, with the grim pleasure of a Cossack hurrying to a prearranged massacre. The thought of misplaced adverbs and misused datives invariably set his scholastic chops to watering. Pertly he laid out the sheets before him.

"Scatterbrain," he muttered, picking up the first and noting the name Hortense Grey across its top. He craned his long neck and peered through his glasses at the other offerings. Mildred Bliss, Elizabeth Pugh, Harriet Ingalls—mute invitations for slaughter.

"Idiots," he sniffed, and uncertain upon which to begin his attack, paused and wiped his glasses.

"Oliver," Mrs. Winterbottom postured timidly in the doorway.

"Yes," said Oliver, "I don't want to be disturbed."

"I know, dear," Mrs. Winterbottom was overcome at this interpretation of her presence. She would as soon have thought of disturbing Oliver in his Satur-

day afternoon labors as of riding piggy-back around the block.

"I just wanted to know if I should close this door," she murmured reproachfully. "I'm going to use the sewing machine."

"I don't care what you do." Mr. Winterbottom was petulant; "only don't bother me."

"It'll make a little noise," she protested meekly.

Mr. Winterbottom controlled himself.

"Please," he exclaimed, turning fully toward her.

Oliver's classroom manner always thrilled Mrs. Winterbottom. She blushed. With a lingering smile at the impatient Cossack she closed the door and tiptoed dreamily into her bedroom.

An hour later Mrs. Winterbottom looked up from her sewing with a start. The door bell was ringing. She realized tardily that it had been ringing for some time. Simultaneously she became aware of her husband's voice. It was very loud.

"For goodness' sake, Amelia, can't you answer that?"

Mrs. Winterbottom arose and oscillated nervously out of the bedroom. Poor Oliver! If only it weren't visitors! As if in corroboration of her fear Oliver's voice came once more from the study.

"Amelia," he called. "I don't wish to see anybody. I told you not to invite people here for Saturday. Of all days," he added bitterly.

Mrs. Winterbottom was about to protest her innocence, when a thing occurred which brought her husband precipitously into the room. Someone was

pounding and kicking at the door of the apartment and shouting as if in a great rage.

"Amelia, open this door. Amelia!"

At the sound of her name, Mrs. Winterbottom halted and turned a stricken face to her husband.

"Oliver," she murmured, in alarm. But Oliver stood blinking and confused. Life had not trained him for emergencies. The people of Mr. Winterbottom's world did not announce their arrival at his home with a fusillade of kicks and savage howls. To add to the outrage the door bell was still ringing violently. At the height of this unprecedented din Mr. Winterbottom's citizenly sense of what was what suddenly enlarged his spirit. He moved angrily forward and unbolted the door. And there came from his lips the cry celebrated in the annals of beleaguered virtue.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

An elegant-looking gentleman in a silk hat bounded into the room as if he had been projected out of a cannon. Hippolyt, tiring of McTavish's efforts to gain the attention of their quarry by ringing the bell in the vestibule had commandeered the automatic elevator and arrived alone before the Winterbottom door.

"Amelia!" he shouted, staring now wildly about. His eyes located the mistress of the house. Advancing with his cane menacingly over his head, he demanded in a hoarse voice, "Where is she?"

"Did you wish to see me?" Mrs. Winterbottom murmured decorously and slid to the floor in a faint.

Oliver, whose righteousness was greater than his fear, seized the arm of his maniacal intruder.

"What," he demanded loudly, "do you want of my wife?"

"I am not interested in your wife," Hippolyt snarled at him. "I want Amelia. Where is she?"

Through his rage Mr. Winterbottom realized that an incredible error was transpiring.

"You are making a mistake," he cried, and then broke off. Mrs. Winterbottom had lifted herself to a sitting posture, revealing a disorder in which she resembled an eighteenth-century adulteress, surprised by the constabulary in a tell-tale moment.

"Amelia," Mr. Winterbottom cried, a new note of alarm in his voice. He detested immodesty, whatever the circumstances. Bending over her he tugged her dress into position.

"Is—is that Amelia?" Hippolyt muttered, pointing savagely at the bewildered Mrs. Winterbottom.

Straightening, his arm assisting his wife to her feet, Mr. Winterbottom perceived that the room was full of people. A young man with an exuberant smile was advancing with outstretched hand.

"How do you do," Rufus Jr. beamed and then turning to his colleagues, added unexpectedly, "better close the door. He's likely to make a bolt for it."

X

Lieutenant McTavish considered the arrest of Professor Oliver Winterbottom for the murder of Enrico Panini the most trying hour and a half of his life. When it was over, however, he felt proud of having acquitted himself with intelligence and dignity. The outrageous and incredible protests of the criminal in the face of the overwhelming evidence would have moved a less philosophic man than himself to violence.

Never, mused Lieutenant McTavish, frowning irritably at his inkwell, never in his entire career had he been confronted by so unscrupulous and hysterical a liar as this little pedagogue. McTavish shivered. His nerves were not as calm as they might be. There had been not only Mr. Winterbottom to contend with but Mr. Winterbottom's wife. His ears were still ringing with her screams. Each time he had sought to question her she had replied by stiffening in her chair, emitting a shriek and falling to the floor in a faint. What an actress!

Now that the incident was over Lieutenant McTavish found himself succumbing to a belated anger. Retrospect invariably aroused the worst side of his nature. He felt now like going down to the basement-cell where Winterbottom was being held ex

communicado and punching his face. There was that about this depraved and pompous creature Winterbottom which from the first moment he had set eyes on him had filled the Lieutenant with a desire to punch his head.

"He is the first criminal," Lieutenant McTavish snorted inwardly, "that I haven't felt sorry for."

He stared at the inkwell for a space and then went on.

"If he gets fresh again I'll knock him down and sit on him and pound the stuffing out of him."

This decision offered a temporary relief. He leaned back in the swivel-chair. But the Winterbottoms had obviously shattered his nerves for the day. This, McTavish reflected, was unusual, for as a rule he admired criminals. That is, he contradicted himself with a frown, he found them interesting. But the Winterbottoms! He drew a deep breath and scratched the back of his head.

It had been one thing for Mrs. Winterbottom to deny in the face of her love-letters, of the passport bearing her photograph and issued in the name of Amelia Panini, of the stateroom on the *Aquitana*, of the trunk filled with her clothes and personal effects located on the Cunard pier, of these and a score of other out-and-out testimonials to her infidelity—it had been one thing for her to deny through an hour and a half of shrieks and convulsions that she had been engaged in a passionate affair with her adored Enrico, that she had planned a transatlantic love hegira with the fascinating magician, to start

that day. Women, he mused, were brazen and irrational creatures fitted by nature for deceits.

But the maniacal attitude assumed by Mr. Winterbottom affected Lieutenant McTavish with a growing sense of outrage. He had managed during the hour and a half to keep his temper by various philosophical expedients, such as meditating during the height of the criminal's well-feigned frenzies on the limitless capacity for evil of the human soul. Now, however, his meditations had collapsed into an impelling desire for vengeance. Never before had he felt himself so much a policeman and never before had he been so pleased with his calling.

Winterbottom had aroused in him the man-hunter hitherto dormant in his leisurely soul. Again Lieutenant McTavish drew a deep breath, and with this breath power and purpose seemed to enter his being. The gentle McTavish vanished and in his place sat a nemesis, a social force dedicated to the scourging of Winterbottoms.

"I'll send him to the chair," this new McTavish sneered excitedly.

He allowed himself a vision of Winterbottom strapped in the death-chamber and awaiting the moment of his dissolution. Amid the nervous hush a tall dominating figure stepped toward the cowardly, shrinking thing in the chair and leveling a forefinger at it announced in triumphant tones:

"Winterbottom, there is still time. Tell the truth and I will see that you get a new trial. This is your last chance. Confess that you lied . . ."

In his day-dream Lieutenant McTavish waited pensively for the soul-satisfying climax. But suddenly he realized that the doomed man was screaming at the top of his voice. "It's a lie. It's an impossible, horrible lie. I never did it. How dare you accuse me . . ."

Lieutenant McTavish dismissed this treacherous finale with an indignant grunt. He looked about him with decision. He was wasting time. The thing to do was to assemble his facts for the coroner's inquest. He would go over the scene briefly and practically. First, the motive. Winterbottom's amazing protests that he had never suspected his wife of an illicit passion for Panini had been, of course, ludicrous. Rufus Jr. had identified him at once as the raving and jealous husband who had engaged him to shadow Mrs. Winterbottom a week ago in that very room. Here Lieutenant McTavish scowled. The professor's reply to this had been, as it turned out, typical. He had never seen Rufus Chittering, Jr., before in his life. He had never in his life hired or even spoken to a detective and he never for a moment, since knowing her, doubted the loyalty and devotion of Mrs. Winterbottom. This brazen denial had driven Rufus Jr. to the point of hysteria.

"I was a fool," McTavish interrupted his retrospect irritably, "not to let the kid knock his block off."

With difficulty ridding his mind of this remorse, Lieutenant McTavish opened his inkwell and fell

to work on a chart of the evidence. He wrote: "Re Winterbottom.

Item 1. Wint. hired R. Chit. to shadow wife. Complete denial by Wint.

Item 2. Panini constant visitor at Wint. home according Hans Egelhofer, janitor; Johann Brietung, elevator boy in Wint. apt. bldg. Complete denial by Mr. & Mrs. Wint.

Item 3. Panini arrived at Wint. home 10:15 on night before murder. Taken to Wint. door by J. Brietung. Complete denial by Mrs. Wint.

Item 4. Wint. not at home, attending annual banquet Philolg. Soc. Wint. confesses truth.

Item 5. Panini left Wint. apt. 11:20. Taken down in el. by J. Brietung. Complete denial by Mrs. Wint.

Item 6. Wint. returned home 11:30 from banquet. Taken up to apt. by Johann Egelhofer. Descrip. by Egel.—'He was dressed up and had on silk hat.' (Note—Wint. admits truth.)

Item 7. Wint. taken down in el. by J. Egel. at 11:35, five minutes after entering home. Wint. excited. Asked Egel: 'How long ago Panini leave?' Egel. told Wint. Wint. more excited. Ran out of el. to street. Wore silk hat. Complete denial by Wint.

Item 8. Howard Olson, milkman, identified Wint. as man in silk hat seen in Panini apt. 4:30 a. m. morning of murder.

Item 9. Hans Egel. saw Wint. sneak into bldg. at 5:05 a. m. morning of murder. Said,

'Hello prof., want ride up?' Wint. no answer. Hu ried up stairs. Looked tired out. Complete den by Wint.

Item 10. Sarah Egelhofer, sister Hans, scrubbi hallways saw Wint. come up stairs, open door Wint. apt. She said, 'Good morning prof.' Wi startled. Said, 'Shh.' Gave her $5. Entered a Complete denial by Mr. & Mrs. Wint.

Item 11. Love-letters signed Amelia fou Panini hotel room, handwriting identified by t exp. Complete denial by Mrs. Wint.

Item. 12. Mrs. Wint. shadowed to Panini a by Rufus Chit., Jr. Complete denial by Mr. a Mrs. Wint.

Item 13. Passports, trunk with Mrs. Wi clothes, steamship tickets, identified by Cunard cle etc. Complete denial by Mrs. Wint.

Item 14. Ewart Henning, living floor und Panini apt., Archer st., identified Mrs. Wint. as fr quent visitor of Panini. Complete denial by M Wint.

Item 15. Panini will found leaving fortune Amelia Winterbottom 'in return for her great sac fice.'"

Here Lieutenant McTavish drew a line careful across the paper. Then he resumed.

"Admissions by Winterbottoms—

Adm. 1. Wint. left banquet Philo. Soc. 11 p. night of murder. Arrived home 11:30.

Adm. 2. Wore silk hat and full dress.

Adm. 3. Mrs. Wint. knew Panini. Met him two or three times long ago."

McTavish paused and after a deep frown drew a line once more across the paper. He continued:

"Summary Winterbottom's alibi—

Wint. returned home 11:30, went to bed without leaving apt. Woke up 8 a. m. Knew nothing of Panini murder until arrival of police."

Lieutenant McTavish read over the results of his day's labors and smiled grimly. He would go out now for a bite, return, order Winterbottom into his office and with the assistance of Miller and Mullins see what effect a little more strenuous cross-examination would have on the creature. After reaching for his hat and carefully locking away his chart of evidence, Lieutenant McTavish paused and scribbled in his note book the following memoranda—

"Ask Wint. how he killed Panini. What methods.

Ask about gun in trunk.

Stick to accusation. Repeat, how—how?"

XI

Mr. Winterbottom was sitting in his cell. After a life of rigorous virtue and relentless right-doing Mr. Winterbottom found himself incredibly staring at the iron bars of a prison cell.

His mind was as yet too bewildered to consider

the details of the debacle. During the two hou
he had already occupied the cell it had occurred
him off and on that he was under some Satanic e
chantment and that if he were to trace the sign of t
cross on the air his prison cell, along with Lieutena
McTavish and all his myrmidons, would vanish
a smell of brimstone and he, Oliver Winterbotto
would find himself happily correcting Latin them
in the study of his tranquil home. However, H
recognized this recurring theory as the aberration
a tortured spirit and with a practicality which d
him credit refused to act on it. Nevertheless he foun
it difficult to eliminate the Evil One from such co
siderations as he was capable of the day's events.

Mr. Winterbottom clutched the wooden benc
on which he was sitting and closed his eyes.
vertigo had seized him again. He was recalled
reason by the chattering of his teeth. Recovere
from this ague he leaned his head against the sto
wall and sighed. But the sense of calm was onl
momentary. Almost immediately the preposterou
and horrifying realities of the afternoon floode
his thoughts once more. He leaped to his feet an
stared desperately about him.

He was innocent. Voices, terrifying in their in
sistence, proclaimed his innocence. In fact h
innocence was almost insupportable. Mr. Winter
bottom's rage was not merely the rage of a ma
who finds himself wrongly imprisoned. Injustic
toward himself and even his wife Mr. Winterbotto
might have borne with some equanimity. But th

monstrous conspiracy which had suddenly exploded, under his nose had obviously for its purpose something more sinister than injustice. Mr. Winterbottom felt that not only had he been thrust into prison but that the entire hierarchy of Law and Order, the divine forces of Truth and Virtue had been hurled into a single dungeon. It was more the enormity of this act than the mere injustice to his physical person that inspired Mr. Winterbottom's rage.

For twenty-five years—Mr. Winterbottom's innocence had begun long before he was fifteen—he had confronted a disheveled world proud of the orderliness of his own soul. He had been for twenty-five years a law abiding, honorable, chaste and God-fearing citizen, proud of his superiority to criticism and contradiction of any sort. And, precipitously, he had found himself torn from his home, denounced by a mob of bellowing, diabolical agents of the Devil, assaulted, humiliated, dragged into a cell and branded as a maniac and a murderer. In vain the remnants of Mr. Winterbottom's irascible mind sought for explanations. He could only, as he stared wildly about him in this cell, realize that he had been violated. He was innocent. The enormity of his innocence, the boundless and inviolable sense of his righteousness threatened to shatter him. It was in such a mood as this under a much inferior goad that the blind and badgered Samson had brought the false Temple down upon the McTavishes of his day.

Righteousness is a dangerous ally. Hardier souls than Mr. Winterbottom have died of it; perished, in fact, in the midst of unspeakable agonies. Indeed there is no torture as difficult to bear as the impotence of Truth—the realization that our conception of ourselves is futile. It is this inability to endure the almost mystical pain of contradiction which makes the owner of a Truth so unreasonable and violent a custodian.

Mr. Winterbottom's innocence of the heinous crime with which he found himself charged was a less vital truth than the righteousness of his opinions, emotions, attitudes and decisions. These, to Mr. Winterbottom, were the inseparable part not only of his own soul but of the soul of morality. Unlike the saints of old who are alleged to have submitted themselves to the wild beasts of the pagan arena with shouts of gratitude, Mr. Winterbottom was not able to derive comfort and balm at the thought of God's loyalty to him in this hour of darkness. He was more a social paragon than a candidate for mystic and heavenly honors. As became a social paragon he had lived to some extent in the eyes of a God who might be relied upon never to contradict him. But chiefly Mr. Winterbottom had lived in the eyes of his fellowmen. And now this vicarious image of himself, this righteous aura which he considered his superior soul—had been ruthlessly extinguished. There was left a Winterbottom who, burning with virtues, cast only a shadow of evil—a phenomenon so intolerable to all his

senses that it seemed during these moments he would die of sheer rage.

Mr. Winterbottom, however, did not die. Instead, crushed to earth he felt himself rising again. A strange giddiness filled his bosom. Dizzily he recognized this remarkable sense as the power of God, the irresistible breath of righteousness. He became filled with an exaltation. In a curious manner he felt himself pregnant with miracles.

"Hey . . . hey!" Officer Miller was calling through the bars.

Mr. Winterbottom turned an exalted smile upon the intrusion.

"Come on, there," keys were opening his cell; "Lieutenant McTavish wants to talk to you upstairs."

Mr. Winterbottom raised his eyebrows politely. Then as the door swung open he paused, stared contemptuously at the figures before him and raising his hand, slowly traced the sign of the cross on the air.

"Nuts," whispered Officer Miller to the turnkey, "he'll prob'ly plead insanity."

Mr. Winterbottom, chagrined at the continuous presence of the McTavish myrmidons, followed them thoughtfully out of the basement. Obviously, he reflected, a strange excitement in his head, the time was not yet ripe for a miracle.

Amelia Winterbottom sat waiting.

"I've just sent for your husband," Lieutenant McTavish glowered at her. "You can stay here as

long as you don't scream. Or faint," he added violently.

Mrs. Winterbottom once had a dream in which she found herself, to her horror, riding on a Fifth Avenue bus and dressed merely in a gaudy chemise made out of green pussy-willow taffeta which she recalled during these frightful moments having admired while on a shopping tour a week before. She sat now rigid and abstracted and regarded Lieutenant McTavish with a similar sense of horror. In this nightmare, however, it was not herself but life which appeared suddenly to have shed its sane and courteous habiliments in favor of a revolting nudity.

XII

Madam Williger was a fragile woman of thirty-six with large glittering eyes and a mass of black hair which, with the aid of innumerable "rats" and Japanese hairpins she erected daily into a ladder of little hills. Her coiffure resembled a leaning and imperiled mosque of St. Sophia.

Delicately molded, waxen-skinned and with the porcelain gestures of a doll, Madam Williger gave the effect of being all eyes and hair. Indeed the restless blazing eyes of Madam Williger seemed to have melted her down and her coiffure to have consumed her.

Ten years ago on the death of her husband the latter's relatives, finding themselves omitted from his largess, had rushed indignantly into court to have their late kinsman declared insane and his will set aside. They offered as proof the fact that he had devoted the last years of his life to the study of disorderly and occult philosophies. It is, in a way, amazing that they failed, for if Mr. Williger was not insane at his death he was at least preoccupied in a manner unbecoming a prosperous and substantial citizen. Mr. Williger's un-American concern with the spirits of another world and his tardy efforts to acquire a wisdom incompatible with the ideals of his country might well have merited the ethical if not pathological finding of insanity.

However, failing in this virtuous effort to assert themselves as his rightful heirs, they immediately turned their attentions to Madam Williger. They sought to have her adjudged insane and incapable of managing the Williger estate. In this they were almost successful. The trial provided a minor sensation in its day. After considering the evidence for three days, however, the judge decided in favor of Madam Williger—or perhaps in favor of the erudite and distinguished experts whom Madam Williger's attorneys had engaged for exorbitant fees to testify to her sanity.

The Williger home, thus preserved for the widow, was an ornate and obsolete manor in one of the streets of lower New York long deserted by people of wealth and etiquette. It was referred to by the

crude and busy denizens of the neighborhood as "Th Bug House." This was because of the curious look ing people to be seen continually entering and leav ing its doors. Gossip surrounded the activities o Madam Williger and her strange guests with vagu legends of debauch and sacrilege such as invariabl flower in the vicinity of incongruous walls. Gossi is, indeed, the sixth sense of the crowd. It is th loose and instinctive tongue which, like some com munity divining-rod, wags automatically in th presence of mysteries.

Madam Williger conducted a salon, a strange an cacophonic forum the like of which was, perhaps not to be found elsewhere in the world. Lighted b lamps embossed with sacred pentacles, flooded wit hieratic perfumes, decorated with cabalistic scrolls Madam Williger dedicated her salon to the illumi nati. Thither came the disheveled and inspire apostles of Unreason. Within its walls, violent wit mirrors and symbols, the abortive dreams, the mysti delusions sacred to the cavernous past of man, foun audience and haven.

Visionaries, healers, reformers, cabalists, Mag anarchists, Messiahs and votaries of theatrical an forgotten gods assembled here nightly like som company released from the box of Pandora. The exchanged theories, experiences and invocations emptied innumerable bottles of consecrated win and platters of curious but appetizing foods, revealed to one another in exalted and symbolical speech th

incommunicable secrets of their power and dispersed with dawn, God alone knew whither.

They discussed the proper invocations for the Sylphs, Undines, Salamanders and Gnomes which are, respectively, the custodians of the East, South, West and North. They determined upon ways of ridding the earth of misery and injustice. They overthrew kings and republican tyrants as well, announced the coming of new Saviors and the invention of machines which would, with the aid of correct incantations, run forever. They engaged in learned and seemingly intelligible debates concerning the Great Arcanum, the mathematics of infinity and the secrets of ecstasy. One heard in their discourse the names, sonorously and reverently pronounced, of William Postel, Raymond Lully, Apollonius of Tyana, Ezekiel, Dionysius the Areopagite, Cornelius Agrippa, Jacob Boehman, Swedenborg, St. Martin, Isaac de Loria, Moscheh of Cordova, Volney, Dupuis, Galatinus Kircher, Apuleius, Cagliostro, Baptista Porta, Jerome Cardan and that strange hermaphroditic sage Philip Theophrastus Bombastus known to the elect as Aureolus Paracelsus and hailed in the works of Eliphas Levi as having been, like the heroes of Rabelais, always drunk and always lucid.

They were not, as may be seen, without their authorities—these outcasts of reason. No less than their contemptuous critics they borrowed strength, guidance and faith from antiquity and no less than the realists among whom they raised their haunted

and unworldly heads, they could summon profoun and erudite masters for their defense.

On Monday evenings Madam Williger's salo was always particularly active by reason of the fa and seclusion which most of her guests practise through the week-end. An unusual array of win and foods was accordingly to be found spread for th famished illuminati. This Monday evening, mor over, provided further unusual interests. Dr. Po tiemkin, Father McGin, Professor Noga and th Marvelous Sarastro were to reveal the results of the efforts over Saturday and Sunday to establish com munication with the spirit of Enrico Panini, wh previous to his mysterious death, had been regarde by Madam Williger and many of her guests as a apostate from the ranks of Occultism. He ha chosen, despite his secret erudition, to posture befo the world as a charlatan. On his several visits t Madam Williger's salon the popular magician ha been greeted with the scorn and abuse his sacrileg merited. Particularly obnoxious had been the fa that Panini, in performing his childish feats of leger dermain had made use as a sesame of the name Alg —that incommunicable word which scientificall uttered invests the adept with the occult forces whic comprise the empire of Hermes. Nevertheless was felt that the charlatan, considering his vast perfidious interest in the true Magic, would not fa to reveal himself and the secret of his death to suc loyal adepts as Professor Noga, Father McGi Sarastro and particularly the learned Dr. Potiemki

Madam Williger took her place on the dais at the end of the incense-clouded chamber a full hour before the arrival of her guests. This was her custom. During the evening she would not rise from her high-backed Saracen chair, but one by one engage her savants, Messiahs and Magi in illuminating converse. To prepare for these inspired moments Madam Williger required a period of concentration. She bowed her head, closed her eyes and brightened her soul with prayer.

Thus preoccupied on the dais, Madam Williger's intention was obvious. She desired to appear to her guests as a spirit out of another and more beautiful world. She felt, as she sat concentrated in the empty room, pleased with herself—as all women who are certain of their effect are pleased with themselves. She was convinced that Madam Williger, viewed from without, was a nameless and radiant apparition such as Ammonius of Alexandria was wont to behold during his visits to the desert.

She was costumed as prescribed in the ritual laid down by the transcendentalist, Alphonse Louis Constant, for adepts on Monday night. She wore a white robe of heavy silk embroidered with silver. It fell from her small waxen shoulders in magnificent and increasing folds to the floor, spreading around her feet in such a manner that Madam Williger seemed to sit in a jewel box. Around her neck, delicate as a child's, she wore the triple necklace of pearls, crystals and selenite. Her high coiffure was partially hidden by a tiara of yellow silk embroidered

with silver characters, which formed in Hebrew the monogram of Gabriel. From a tripod at her side rose the perfumes of sandalwood, camphor, amber, aloes and ground cucumber seed. Behind her the ray of the magic lamp, which was the chief glory of her home, cast its revolving and changing color. Beholding her under the eerie light of its nine wicks blazing within painted globes and tubes of tinted water one might easily have fancied her, as she hoped, some hieratic apparition evoked out of the clouds of incense. This possibility filled Madam Williger with a sense of triumph and well-being.

Promptly at nine o'clock her three servants unlocked the outer doors of the Williger home and retired from the scene. The illuminati poured in. The mirrored chamber began to rattle and hum with greetings, with expostulations, with the eating and drinking of hungry mouths. Graciously recognizing the needs of her guests Madam Williger allowed the first hour of her salon to be given to the consumption of food and wine. From the end of the room, her eyes glittering, her coiffure trembling, she watched the animated scene and quivered like some child in fairy-land at the sight of each new and distinguished guest.

Groups were formed, disciples gravitating to their spokesmen, surrounding them, wine cup and sandwich in hand—eager, loyal and unquestioning before these oracles of Bedlam. In one corner a short, paunchy, pink-skinned man with the beaming air of a hero acknowledging from his carriage the cheers

of admiring throngs, stood addressing a colorful knot of women. He was Dr. Shapiro, founder of the Open Life Colony in Michigan. He had hoped, he was explaining, to obtain by his undertaking the complete and exhaustive sex histories of the one hundred and fifty men and women who had nobly, in the interests of science, followed him into the wilderness. Each member of the colony had pledged to keep a diary of his and her sexual life, writing down faithfully their innermost thoughts, sensations and actions. At the conclusion of the year it had been his hope that with the aid of these unique and authentic documents he would be able to present the world with certain revolutionary information concerning the Spirito-Magnetic need—as he phrased it—of the sexes. Unfortunately, his followers despite their vows of preparing and keeping their diaries in complete secrecy had, after the first month, fallen into the habit of comparing notes. In fact, he admitted with the bitterness of science toward the immemorial crudities of the laity, the chief social entertainment of the colony was diary-reading.

"The diaries," he shook his head pityingly, "have as a result become worthless to the science of Spirito-Magnetics. Written now chiefly with the view of being read aloud at these surreptitious and totally unscientific gatherings they are no good. They are full of lies. They contain little more than boasts, the weaker members of the colony who offer such a problem for the Spirito-Magnetist, vying with the stronger in fictitious accounts of their libido. What

is most unfortunate as a result of this comparing of notes, is that the diaries are all alike. The thing I hoped for, the inner truth of my disciples' sex life, is not in them. We will have to start over—throw all the diaries away and begin with a new set—a totally new set of subjects."

A woman of thirty dressed completely in orange, who somehow looked like a poodle dog—her white powdered face popping unsuccessfully out of a frame of frizzy reddish hair—expressed her horror of Dr. Shapiro's unethical Spirito-Magnetites. She was known to the salon as Daphne and because of her curious experiences—she had married and divorced in rapid succession a sadist, a Uranian, a catamite and an androgyne, was considered an authority on the more scientific phases of love. She offered herself as a member of Dr. Shapiro's reorganized colony.

"You must not give up, Doctor," she announced authoritatively; "I feel sure that you will find many sincere and worthy disciples among us. Like myself," she added, her poodle-dog face assuming intuitively the expression of a perfect Spirito-Magnetite.

In another part of the room a square faced, pallid man in a frock-coat was beginning his evening's pronouncements. He had, while employed as the shepherd of a large and orthodox synagogue, assumed, unexpectedly, the name of Rabbi Jehuda Hakadosch Hanassi, the last chief of the Tenainis, who in the second century had collected the first and only true Cabalistic book of the Talmud. With his new

identity he had simultaneously announced from his altar that it was his intention to restore the Jews to their ancient sovereignty over the world through the study of the occult secrets contained in the six sederim of the *Mischna*. After a brief but stormy discussion among the elders of the synagogue he had been removed as a rabbi, branded as a dangerous heretic and denied the society of the orthodox. Recently another misfortune had befallen the outlawed scholar. His wife had left him.

On this evening he had selected Miss West as his confidante, addressing her out of the half dozen figures around him. Miss West, a tall, emaciated survivor of innumerable attempts at suicide, specialized in unfortunate love affairs, her own and others. She was considered an authority on masculine perfidy, abortions and astrology. Rabbi Jehuda regarded her with sad, garrulous eyes.

"Converts are slow," he informed her, "the Jews cling to their mediocrity. But I have completed my attack on Maimonides, soon to be published. I will send you a copy. It disposes of him for all time. I have proven conclusively that this unfortunate rationalist has corrupted the powerful and mystic soul of the Jew."

"Yes," said Miss West, feelingly, "there's a hospital named after him."

The scholar continued angrily, unable to fit this piece of data into his remarks.

"This creature, this ethical mathematician has ruined my people. Yes, Maimonides found a race

of seers and converted them into citizens, a crime for which he has been rewarded by the fat and diabetic refuse of Judaism."

Miss West, stirred by the scholar's emotion, inquired after his domestic troubles.

"Have you recovered from your sorrow?" her long face was intimate and hopeful; "the conjunction of the stars for September pronounce happiness."

Rabbi Jehuda Hakadosch Hanassi closed his eyes as if in pain.

"It is said in the Talmud," he answered quietly, "that the altar weeps when the husband and wife separate."

A tall youth resembling a much-disheveled copy of the Hofmann "Christ"—blond-bearded, long-haired, thin-nosed and sandaled but in a suit of modern, ill-fitting clothes—was relating his latest misfortune. He was highly esteemed as a visionary and having been known during his seizures to give utterance to unique and important prophecies, he was always listened to with respect despite the obvious discrepancies in his claim to the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. He had appeared two years ago at the salon, an unkempt caricature of the Galilean whom Madam Williger venerated, in company with thirty or forty other personages of history, as an accomplished Magus. After listening in silence for several hours to the learned talk around him, the lanky youth had suddenly thrown off his restraint and announced himself as a Savior come to rid the earth of misery and darkness. Questioned by Dr. Potiemkin, whose

broad interest in ecstatics had at once endeared the youth to him, the new Savior had submitted his history. He had lived since he was fifteen the life of a recluse in the hills of Arkansas, subsisting on locusts and honey. He was now twenty-five and had felt himself called to reveal his message. He had accordingly made his way to New York. His name, he added, was Alaska.

Dr. Potiemkin as well as Professor Noga had perceived in him a true and natural adept and were reminded, by the simplicity of his statements, of Pope Sixtus V who, while tending his sheep as a lad, had suddenly remarked to one of them, "I am going to be a Pope."

Alaska, however, had subsequently caused Madam Williger a great deal of embarrassment. He had developed, perhaps as the result of his unnatural diet, or perhaps, as Professor Noga insisted, because of inimical astral influences, a love of sweets. His appetite for candies and cakes had finally become too powerful to control. He had, in consequence, several times broken into confectionery stores. The police, summoned by burglar-alarms and riot-calls had found a weeping, long-haired creature gorging himself on stolen dainties and proclaiming in broken-hearted tones that he was the Savior Jesus struggling in the Devil's grip. Madam Williger had interceded each time and obtained his release.

Alaska, surrounded by an expectant group, was taking issue with Mr. Minus, a celebrated thorn in the sides of the Pharisees. Mr. Minus, bubbling,

indomitable and Falstaffian, was in the throes of his forty-third great campaign for rescuing the poor.

"This time," he was explaining, "I am merely going to advertise Poverty. People are not cruel. They are complacent and forgetful. This Christmas I am going to recall them to their duties, to their ideals. I am going to march 2,000 starving, homeless men and women recruited from the depths—the lowest depths." Mr. Minus was proud of this source and repeated it excitedly, "from the very lowest depths—march them into St. Patrick's Cathedral and demand that they be allowed to sleep there overnight. They will be thrown out, clubbed and arrested by the police . . ."

"Sacrilege," Alaska interrupted in his high-pitched voice; "it is wrong for people to sleep in church."

"Calling people's attention to the falseness of their souls, to the collapse of the Master's command, is not sacrilege," the humanitarian boomed. " 'Suffer all to come unto me regardless,' " he quoted violently but at random.

"But not to sleep, not to sleep," Alaska persisted.

The argument was interrupted by the appearance of a middle-aged man with a mop of red hair, who sailed across the room flopping his legs and arms as if he were being blown by a heavy wind. He was Professor Tishabov, inventor of a perpetual-motion machine, photographs and diagrams of which stuffed the pockets of his loose clothes. He had

been a Mormon in his youth but his inventiveness had led him to abandon the religion of his fathers and become successively a Christian Scientist, a Buddhist, a Theosophist, a Bahaist, and finally, as he put it, a World Philosopher.

Professor Tishabov waved his arms and demanded peremptorily that two of the women retire with him to Madam Williger's bedroom. He explained that he had suffered an inexplicable setback in his work, a fact which he attributed to the unnatural behavior of his aura. He desired to undress and stand before the black velvet curtains in Madam Williger's bedroom and have his aura analyzed. Two of Alaska's admirers volunteered.

A severe-looking woman approached Madam Williger. She was fashionably gowned, her face aloof and sullen. She resembled one of those taut and sinister heroines celebrated in the Marquis de Sade's *Romance of Justine*. Her black hair pulled sleekly back from her forehead in the manner of a Viennese actress added to her unscrupulous air.

Madam Williger turned her eyes nervously to Bella Moore. She considered her an evil and lecherous woman and had a number of times listened with almost maidenly horror to the creature's calm though terrifying proposals.

"Do you feel as you look?" Bella Moore inquired, her voice throaty, her eyes arrogant and sleepy.

"How do I look?" Madam Williger faltered.

"Divine," Bella Moore smiled.

Madam Williger withdrew her hand from her flatterer's caressing fingers. Her confusion and anger were distracted, however, by a commotion at the other end of the room. A group of guests had entered. Bella Moore turned from the dais. Madam Williger's eyes glittered happily. The newcomers were her favorites—Professor Noga, Sarastro, Father McGin and Dr. Potiemkin. A fifth and unfamiliar figure accompanied them—a blond-faced and disdainful-looking man of the world in a silk hat.

Professor Noga was the first to approach the dais. He was a thick-set, full-blooded man with ripe lips and beetling eyebrows. He wore his black hair close-cropped and on the whole resembled one of those substantial-looking Germans who are continually being executed as Bluebeards, bomb-throwers or the agents of outlandish and incredible crimes. He carried, as always, his black bag in which was packed his famous hypnotic brick. Professor Noga would, if the occasion demanded or the spirit of Apollonius moved him, hang his brick from a nail and setting it to swinging pendulum-fashion, fall to his knees. His eyes riveted upon the moving object he was able to project himself into a state of communion with his favorites in the astral plane.

At his side stood Father McGin, an emaciated-looking man with a bony and projecting forehead. His blue, shaven cheeks and chin, his eyes staring grimly at inward dreams, his stiffened posture, belonged more to one who had presided at the racks

and auto da fé of the Middle Ages than to a modern priest unfrocked for sacrilege. Dr. Potiemkin joined them after a moment. He was a tall, cadaverous man with a rigid, seemingly varnished face. A doubtful and ominous smile turned his thin lips. A didactic, inhospitable manner fitted itself like a mask over his words and gestures.

The Magi addressed Madam Williger gravely and launched at once into the reports of their pursuit of Panini in the Black Kingdom. Professor Noga, the first to speak, related that Panini had revealed himself at 3 A. M. that morning and after being properly intimidated by the poignard of Psyche had, in reply to questions, stated that he had been justly murdered by a man whom he had cruelly wronged.

Madam Williger looked disappointed. She turned to Father McGin for further and more interesting details.

"Panini," Father McGin spoke camly in the gentle voice brought with him out of the priesthood, "was killed by Typhon, the evil spirit of the Egyptians whom he rashly evoked through the ritual prescribed in the Grimoire of Honorious. He was strangled by the diabolic finger and now writhes in torment among the larvæ and lemures of the Lower State."

Madam Williger was pleased. She nodded eagerly. But Dr. Potiemkin interrupted the ex-priest.

"Panini," Dr. Potiemkin announced dryly, "is not dead."

"I have seen him," Professor Noga scowled; "he revealed himself in his winding sheet."

"That is possible"; the Russian was courteous and masked; "you undoubtedly interviewed his aura."

"I am well aware of the differences between the aura of life and the shade of death," Professor Noga frowned.

"Nevertheless," Dr. Potiemkin was firm, "Panini is alive. He has amused himself with a black jest."

"But the body found in the trunk!" Madam Williger exclaimed, unable to decide in her soul whether she preferred Panini alive or dead.

"There was nothing found in the trunk," Dr. Potiemkin replied stiffly. "The police were under an enchantment. Panini cast a spell. Sarastro is certain that on first entering the room he detected the odor of vervain and wild parsley."

"It is true," Sarastro appeared before the dais and bowed. "Panini is not dead. The trunk, the gun shot, the body found—all these are part of a black necromancer's illusion. We have obtained permission from the police to enter the undertaking rooms where the alleged remains are being kept. Tomorrow at midnight Dr. Potiemkin and I, fortified against the evil spells of Panini will perform the ritual of the Pentagram over the false image. And it will disappear."

Hippolyt Bruga emptied his fourth glass of wine and stood contemplating the salon of Madam Willi-

ger. Grief and anger filled his heart. Five days had passed since the death of Panini. He had spent the five days in tireless and methodical search for the missing Amelia. His strange love for a seemingly legendary woman had taken complete possession of him. His spirit knew neither rest nor peace. Driven by his obsession he moved through the city, his eyes fixed on crowds, his senses in a continual and unreasonable tremble of expectation. He grew furious at the sight of so many people who were not Amelia. Night found him still haunting the streets. He slept in parks, fearful of returning to Antonica's merciless welcomes, and dawn found him again launched on his quest. He would cause her to appear. She would emerge from the tangle of the city like the images of which Sarastro babbled continually. He visited theatrical offices, questioned hundreds of attachés, became a familiar though surprising figure in the stage alleys. His energy was enormous, his persistence incredible. He grew thinner. His finery was undergoing a dissolution. The silk hat was battered from having fallen so often from his head. The Prince-Albert was wrinkled. His linen was stained. The edges of his collar were frayed and a blond stubble covered his chin. Nevertheless he was still Count Hippolyt Bruga, a nobleman in distress, an aristocrat buoyed by hope under the bludgeonings of fate.

The wine sharpened his senses and lifted him slowly out of his unhappy dream. Amelia retreated into the recesses of his mind. Thus might Jason

for a moment have put from his thought the vision of the Fleece. He looked about him and the glittering, humming scene grew pleasant. Gravely he removed a silken-covered rod from his pocket and waved it gently over his fifth glass of wine. He had received the wand that morning from the estate of Panini. He drank, and smiled at a number of people. He had not moved from the table covered with bottles and platters since entering the room. It was with difficulty he had made his way through the ranks of the hungry salonites as soon as he had discovered the objects of their attraction. He was not going to relinquish his strategic position, despite the seeming lull. He poured himself a sixth glass of wine.

Gazing around him he felt pleased by his perspicacity. Another general descent upon the table seemed in progress. He planted himself more firmly, not to be taken in by the seeming garrulity and indecision of the throngs drifting toward him. A short red-faced woman with an enormous body waddled to his side. He recognized her as the anarchist leader, Fanny Cohen.

"Hello," she addressed him, "what's the matter? You look like the skeleton at the feast."

"And you," he replied, holding his glass to his lips, "look like a fishwife who has run away from home to have her fortune told."

Fanny Cohen laughed. Hecklers were no novelty to her.

"Clothes," she answered, "evidently do not make the gentleman."

"My clothes," Hippolyt spoke coldly, "fail to alter your unfortunate appearance—in my eyes."

He regarded her critically for an instant and then with a smile which appeared to corroborate his words, turned from her. Professor Tishabov, his aura analyzed to his satisfaction, was talking. He waved his arms about, a red-headed scarecrow in a gale, and declaimed:

"The victories on which science prides itself today are nothing. Less than nothing. Toys which the fools in laboratories coax out of nature. All our inventions and discoveries will seem tomorrow no more than that—toys with which children blindly amused themselves. When the great secret is revealed we will look back and the so-called wonders of science at which fools marvel today will seem as wonderful as the wheelbarrow and the tack hammer."

"There is no science," Dr. Potiemkin interrupted dryly.

"You are right," Professor Tishabov agreed. "There is only this." He indicated his forehead proudly. "If you talk of miracles," he went on turning to Hippolyt, "explain to me the vitrified forts of Scotland. What is the secret of their walls? Explain to me the great pillars of Yucatan which no human hands could have erected or moved. There are two pyramids in the Sahara whose peaks are circled with shells, marine fossils and other evidences

of aquatic inundation. What science performed these miracles?"

Hippolyt raised his eyebrows politely and smiled.

"This science," Professor Tishabov concluded tensely with another tap at his forehead, "the science of thought. The power that can move mountains, bring the sea into deserts, shatter fortresses with its vibrations."

"There are two worlds," Dr. Potiemkin spoke, "the visible and the invisible. The visible is a mere shadow of this other world. Those who struggle to gain mastery over the visible world and who call themselves scientists are like the fish in the sea who imagine that the shores are the limits of life and that the surface which they sometimes behold is the boundary of the infinite."

"There are some fish," Professor Noga interjected, eyeing Hippolyt's disdainful face, "who never even rise to the surface."

"You talk," Hippolyt regarded Dr. Potiemkin languidly, "as if reason were a misfortune which had never befallen you. Or man," he added.

"Reason," the Russian answered, "is the candle around which fools go blind."

"Reason," Hippolyt continued, closing his eyes and smiling aloofly, "gives birth to caricatures and monsters as well as order and beauty. There are people who seek to escape from the inhospitable facts of life by imagining that they are not fish—but glass eagles."

It was Dr. Potiemkin's turn to smile.

"You do not believe," he said pityingly, "in mysticism?"

Hippolyt's eyes wandered around the salon.

"Since the beginning of time," he answered, "men's heads have been exploding with dreams. And they have mistaken the débris for another world."

Rabbi Jehuda Hakadosch Hanassi had joined the group.

"You are wrong," he announced, "it is we who are the débris—the refuse of the past."

Dr. Potiemkin nodded.

"We are the playthings of good and evil," he went on, "of conscious forces which guide or attack us. Enormous, shattering forces which are the custodians of all power. They can be studied, and controlled—evoked, disarmed and harnessed to the service of man."

"Mysticism," Hippolyt replied, "is a tireless rhetoric which the vocabulary seeks to substitute for the word 'Nothing.'"

Professor Noga was excited.

"The formidable goat of Mendes," he demanded, "the Ahriman of the Persians, the Typhon of the Egyptians, the old serpent of the Jews, the bearded idol of the medieval alchemists, the Baphomet of the Templars—these are nothing?"

"Nothing," Hippolyt replied coldly, "but words."

"And God?" cried Mr. Minus, the Thorn.

"A word," repeated Hippolyt firmly. "If one

crawls around long enough inside of a word one will emerge with his head out of shape."

Mr. Minus snorted.

"My head," he boomed, "is not out of shape."

"The inside of your head," Hippolyt replied, "reveals all its unfortunate contours in the way you pronounce the word God."

Rabbi Jehuda Hakadosch Hanassi had not been listening. He began to speak with bitterness.

"The Jews," he said, "were given the custody of the Secret and this Secret was inscribed by means of parable and symbol in the Cabala. But the Jews have closed the avenue which leads to power. They have betrayed their guardianship of the Arcanum."

Dr. Potiemkin frowned.

"The Jews," he replied, "who are a garrulous race have indeed talked themselves out of their divinity. The Secret, however, of which you speak was not their exclusive property. The lost mysteries of Eleusis and Thebes testify to this. The early Greeks were closer to the invisible than the Israelites. Homer, the last and most confused historian of their vanished powers, has sketched the secret book of antique initiation on the shield of Achilles, describing its plan and chief figures with minute precision."

"The Jews," persisted Rabbi Jehuda Hakadosch Hanassi, "have only to assert themselves, seize the divine key in their hands once more and the universe will open to them."

"Cornelius Gemma in his *Critical Universal History*," Dr. Potiemkin replied stiffly, "relates that as late as the year 454 the apparition of Moses appeared to the Jews in the island of Candia. Believing they were about to be delivered into another promised land they followed the gigantic and astral figure as it drifted out into the water. Those behind, shouting and praying, crowded those in front, convinced that there was in them the power that had led their fathers unharmed through the Red Sea. They plunged by the myriads into the water and were drowned."

"Cornelius Gemma," Rabbi Jehuda Hakadosch Hanassi answered warmly, "was a notorious liar and Jew-baiter who satisfied his lust for Jewish blood by inventing fictions concerning their slaughter."

"The reign of the Messiah will come," Mr. Minus quoted boomingly, "when the people shall be forever delivered from the oppression of the kings of the earth."

"A parable," the rabbi cried, "stolen and misinterpreted from the Talmud. It means . . ."

Hippolyt had emptied his seventh wine glass.

"It means," he interrupted, "that poetry is the glowing outline of confusion and that fools and madmen mistake the invention of mysteries for their solution."

Dr. Potiemkin's face had begun to glow as if under a fresh coat of varnish.

"The invention of mysteries," he said quietly, "has been left to others." As he spoke he moved

to a tapestry-hidden window and flinging back the hangings, opened it dramatically. He stood for a moment as if under a sudden enchantment, his arm extended and thrust toward the sky.

"Who," he spoke softly, "who invented these? Look out of this opening and let a single glimpse deny and destroy you."

A hush fell on the group who had recognized immediately in his tones the voice of prophecy.

"Stars wheeling through space," he went on, "an infinity of worlds boiling in a limitless sea. Whose mysteries are these?" Dr. Potiemkin quivered and paused. "What madman invented these gulfs of darkness? You are proud of your denials. You stare at these monstrous shapes that glitter down so calmly on your blind head and affirm they are nothing."

"They are stars," said Hippolyt with a pensive smile.

"They are the chariots of Jehova," Dr. Potiemkin continued, his finger trembling in the night. "It is this you call nothing, this illimitable veil behind which sits the avalanche of God. Every inch of earth and heaven is alive with His Word. Its secrets speak through phantoms and genii. Its meanings suspend themselves in invisible lightnings. Its voice rolls like ceaseless thunders out of the chimeras and apparitions who outnumber the stars, and the drops of waters of the earth."

Dr. Potiemkin shivered. His voice grew soft and compelling.

"Deny," he demanded, "deny the Presence. Deny the Power and the Word which breathe in the night over us. And tell me then the meaning of these . . . the meaning of light and darkness, earth and heaven. Let me hear you answer it with your vaunted reason—the meaning of this night."

Hippolyt stared sullenly into the star-lighted sky. The eighth wine glass trembled in his hand.

"Night," he replied slowly, "is the Madonna of the spaces. It is a flower whose petals bloom in my soul. The night is a black cross upon which reason crucifies itself. The night is a stranger bowed and weary who asks lodging in my heart. What you mistake for God is the unedited whisper with which the body answers the caress of nature, of winds and stars. I see no Gods."

He broke off and sipped his wine pensively as if regretting his limited vision. Dr. Potiemkin closed the window and watched him with a doubtful and ominous smile.

"I am interested in what you say," Dr. Shapiro thrust his pink and beaming face forward. "I am a student of Spirito-Magnetics. It is my opinion that your apostrophe to the night no less than Dr. Potiemkin's is pure sublimation—an abortive cry of the sexual instinct searching for a mate. The lingam is the only true symbol of infinitude."

Hippolyt scowled and walked abruptly from the group. His mood had returned to Amelia. He felt an impulse to leave the salon and renew his search. Then, perhaps because the room was warm and pleas-

ing and still dotted with unopened wine bottles, the idea came to him that Amelia might be among those around him. This, he decided quickly, however, was absurd. Amelia in this throng of lunatics! Amelia, the silent and shining one, rational as a flower, enigmatic as the fingers of night! He leaned against a mirror in the wall and dreamed of her for moments. Nevertheless he decided to remain. Sarastro appeared before him.

"Are you enjoying yourself?" he inquired graciously. He had induced the nobleman to accompany him to the salon.

"Fools," Hippolyt murmured, "are always interesting. Particularly when isolated as carefully as this." He gestured languidly at the room.

"We have decided upon a course with Panini," Sarastro changed the subject. Hippolyt, however, interrupted him.

"I am bored with Panini," he was irritable. "I don't want to hear about him."

"Come," Sarastro shrugged his shoulders, "I will introduce you to our hostess."

"I will introduce myself," Hippolyt replied with petulance and moved away. The thought had come to him that he was wasting his time speaking to men. There were women waiting his flattering attentions. He gazed about with determination.

"They all look like last year's bargains," he reflected. "It is evidently only ugly and withered women who go in for the major delusions." The thought of Amelia deterred him for a moment, as it

had deterred him from sins of the flesh, barring of course his venereal obligations to Antonica, since he had first beheld her in Panini's dressing room. After considering the matter for another moment this fidelity to his ideal presented itself to him in a new light.

"My love for Amelia," he mused, "is not of the flesh."

Thus absolved he turned himself whole-heartedly to the quest of a woman—one, he murmured, whose body would provide a substantial antidote for the stupidity and ugliness of her mind. He closed his eyes happily. Opening them he perceived a small table which had previously escaped him. It was covered with glasses and bottles. Hippolyt poured his ninth glass. Pleased with its taste he poured himself a tenth and almost immediately an eleventh glass.

A bedizened old woman, fluttering a fan and mincing along, her face enthusiastically lifted toward a dark-skinned gentleman in a white turban, paused suddenly in her tracks and wheeled about with a gasp. Somebody had slapped her violently on her bustle. She stared around in alarm, her eyes encountering a young man, wine glass in hand who at the sight of her face contorted his own into a grimace of disgust.

Miss West, leaning on the arm of Rabbi Jehuda Hakadosch Hanassi halted before a mirror and, pointing her finger at the crowd of images in its

depths, murmured to her escort, "These, too, are alive no less than us . . . don't you think?"

Rabbi Jehuda Hakadosch Hanassi was about to reply when Miss West interrupted him with a faint scream.

"Who did that?" she demanded.

"Count Bruga," the rabbi regarded her assailant with alarm.

"He slapped me," Miss West cried.

Hippolyt, sipping the wine from his thirteenth glass, rolled his eyes meaningfully and concluded with a slow, portentous wink.

"He's drunk," Miss West snorted and, seizing her melancholy and confused escort, hurried away.

Annoyed by his two failures at seduction, Hippolyt steadied himself for a moment against the table-edge and then ventured into the crowd. He felt remarkably proud.

"Fools," he exclaimed, thrusting himself abruptly into the midst of a learned discussion.

"We were speaking of the forces," Dr. Shapiro began diplomatically.

"Fools," repeated Hippolyt. He winked knowingly at a young woman in an orange dress. Leaning against her he pressed his lips suddenly to her cheek. Dr. Shapiro regarded him with scientific interest.

"The libido," he said, "escapes the will . . ."

"How dare you!" the young woman plucked a hand from her dress, and hurried away.

Hippolyt leered and struggled back to the wine-

table. He refreshed himself, took his position against the mirror and endeavored to think. His subsequent antics caused a stir at his end of the room. Unbeknown to the seers and prophets about him Count Hippolyt Bruga had undergone a metamorphosis. The grandeurs and restraints of nobility had fallen from him. Bacchus, potent necromancer, had evoked a lewd and guffawing plebeian out of the Prince-Albert and the silk hat.

A resounding slap on his face, delivered by an outraged and enormous woman who on closer inspection turned out to be Fanny Cohen, convinced Hippolyt that his position was not an advantageous one and that his seductive tactics were passing for naught. He refreshed himself once more and moved away.

Madam Williger, momentarily abandoned by her savants, sat staring into space. Hippolyt, before the dais, studied her critically and made up his mind. Removing Panini's wand from his pocket he waved it in the air and bowed elaborately. Madam Williger received this salutation with a serious and attentive nod. Hippolyt straightened and, after a long pause, recited:

"Your hair is a tortured midnight."

Madam Williger, used to the pronouncements of the illuminati, entered the conversation gracefully.

"Have you read the poet Synesius?" she asked.

"No," replied Hippolyt evenly, "I do not read poetry. I write it."

"Synesius," Madam Williger went on dreamily,

"was the greatest of the Christian poets. His treatise on dreams is deservedly famous. I recommend it to you . . . if you are suffering."

"Are you interested in dreams?" Hippolyt inquired eagerly, fascinated by the celerity with which he had moved the conversation into the bedroom.

"I am interested in all manifestations," Madam Williger replied. Hippolyt waved his wand.

"You are like a dream yourself," he staggered up on the dais.

Madam Williger was somewhat confused, but she respected wands.

"Is that a real wand?" she inquired professionally. Hippolyt, despite his condition, remembered his Jurgen. He considered the question full of possibilities.

"Yes," he rolled his eyes.

"It is probably only a toy," Madam Williger drew back.

Delighted, Hippolyt answered, "You underestimate it, O incense-clouded figure. With this wand I can accomplish miracles. It is the evoker of dreams and phantoms."

"Where did you get it?" Madam Williger was now almost out of her chair in terror. Hippolyt's hand was playing with her neck.

"Panini," he exclaimed, "Panini's wand . . ."

"Panini!" cried Madam Williger, rising. She faltered for a moment between terror and curiosity. "Let me see it," she added.

Roguishly Hippolyt waved the rod before her

eyes. Madam Williger reached for it and then screamed. For a moment a hundred eyes accustomed to the apparitions and monsters beyond the astral veil stared unbelievingly at the tableau on the dais.

Madam Williger, kicking and clawing, her hair fallen, the yellow tiara hanging by a pin, was struggling in the arms of a strange being in a silk hat. Professor Noga prostrated himself. Madam Williger screamed again.

"You are only attracting attention," Hippolyt sneered, his lips in her ear.

Dr. Potiemkin, followed by a half dozen men, reached the dais. Hippolyt dropped his fair burden and confronted them furiously.

"Sacrilege," Madam Williger murmured from the floor.

The salon became filled with shouts. Above them rose the voice of Count Hippolyt Bruga, profane and violent. The six men began to move from the dais. Howling and struggling Hippolyt moved in their midst. At the door he made a sudden and determined stand.

"My hat," he shouted, "where's my hat?"

Willing hands clapped the missing tile over his head, jamming it down on his ears. The door opened and Hippolyt sprawled into the night.

He picked himself up from the pavement. He was alone. The night was cool and lighted with stars.

"Amelia," he murmured, a heavy frown coming over his face, "forgive me . . ."

XIII

Such was the curious nature of Hippolyt Bruga that, on awakening the next morning, he decided at once to resume his quest of a woman, a quest frustrated by the clumsy antics, the pathologic and unaccountable behavior, he recalled bitterly, of Madam Williger. A drug addict, he continued to belabor his vague, hangover memories of the creature, a depraved and nerve-shattered moron whom, in his innocence, he had mistaken for a woman capable of love and desire.

A prodigious frown wrinkled Hippolyt's nose. Not only had his trust been betrayed by this semi-idiot but a number of sycophantic guests still smarting under the intellectual drubbing he had given them, had, at a sign from her morphine-disordered mind, fallen upon him and attempted to throw him out. He recalled with a sneer the manner in which they had slunk from him as he faced them, his cane uplifted, and how subsequently, like a pack of lackeys, they had brought him his hat and stood by nervously as he hurled a final searing denunciation at them. This closed the incident in Hippolyt's mind. He turned to the contemplation of fresher victories. He thought of his unsatisfied desires.

"Sex," he mused, "is a necessary vacation from beauty. It is a Public Comfort Station in which one may decorously pay homage to certain impressive but unimportant needs."

Again, as during the previous evening, Amelia's relation to his contemplated infidelity presented itself.

"My conscience is a clumsy and obsolete contrivance which does not understand me," he reflected grimly. "It is worried at the thought of my betraying Amelia by embracing some little fool. Conscience is the fat and simpering virgin who changes the linen on the roué's bed. And like all virgins she is a confused and maudlin egomaniac. My love for Amelia, oh Conscience, is something which does not require a change of linen at your hands to keep it clean and respectable. My love for Amelia is not the little bourgeoise picnic in which the senses indulge at the sight of a luscious woman. It is an emotion which chooses to play truant from life."

He paused and visualized himself as a heavy-legged uncle puffing confusedly after his truant, starlit soul.

"How can I do justice to my exquisite love for Amelia," he went on irritably, "if my mind remains clouded with the vulgar images of a passion which not she, but my lower nature, inspires."

He decided to shave.

"Her spirit will understand," he reflected hopefully, studying his lathered face in a cracked mirror. "She will know that whatever I do my heart holds

itself to her lips—like a beggar's empty cup lifted for alms."

A half-hour later he murmured with a sigh:

"Farewell, Amelia, until I return . . ."

He closed the door behind him and started slowly down the stairs. The odors of musty carpet, decomposing wallpaper-paste and frying bacon, brought Antonica to his mind.

"Why not?" he mused. "She will do as well as any other effigy of flesh. An eager woman," he went on argumentatively, "has two bodies. Crude as Antonica is to the eyes, the senses, if the room is sufficiently darkened, may behold her fairy-tale dream of herself—the body and soul of a wistful cocotte knocking dizzily at the grand seigneur's door."

He paused on the landing to enjoy the thought of the obsequious gratitude he was about to inspire. The fact that he had been avoiding her for a week fearful, even, of returning to his loft for sleep, contributed a sense of largesse to his immediate plans. The prospect of Antonica's fawning and pneumatic embraces which since his tenancy he had accepted as a martyrdom became now a matter of curious exhilaration. So pleased, in fact, was his mood that he marveled at his previous hostility toward this buxom houri and approached the door of the Pamphula apartment tenderly and reminiscently.

Antonica, he paused to listen, would be occupied in her morning tasks unless, he frowned, she had already left to do her marketing. There was no

sound to be heard in the apartment. He knocked and pressed his ear immediately to the wooden panel. The possibility of her not being home chilled and angered him. He knocked again, this time loudly and commandingly as befitted a grand seigneur. Squatting down, he glued his ear to the keyhole and was rewarded by sudden unmistakable signs of occupancy. Antonica's voice, firm with the belligerent and righteous note of the aroused housewife cried out,

"Who ees-a there? What-a you want?"

Hippolyt smiled dreamily at this unsuspecting but pertinent inquiry. As an answer he offered three slow raps on the door, certain that she would recognize her own amorous signal, and waited. The door opened cautiously, introducing a smell of laundry-soap and fried liver into the hall. Antonica in her nightgown, barefooted, billowing and inquisitive, regarded him with flushed eyes.

"What-a you want?" she demanded, "go away."

Hippolyt reached through the narrow opening and seized her nightgown. He pursed his lips and, closing his eyes, bestowed a kiss languorously on the air.

"Go way," Antonica repeated, to his astonishment, "I got-a no time."

Hippolyt, deciding to ignore this unwonted coyness, tugged roguishly at her nightgown, pulling it out so that she resembled a sleepwalker in a high wind.

"Are you unusually busy?" he winked meaning-

fully, and held his face toward her, showering kisses on the air. "Um, um, um."

Antonica pulled her nightgown indignantly out of his fingers.

"Go on. Go way," she muttered, and made an effort to close the door.

"Um, um," cried Hippolyt and thrust his body forward. The door flung open. His hand clutching at the retreating nightgown, he halted suddenly and remained staring beyond Antonica's frightened face at the bedroom. Rodenja Pamphula, his bald head and bony face protruding out of a rumpled pile of bedding lay puffing languidly and fastidiously on a cigarette. On a table beside the bed stood the familiar bottle of the Golden Elixir. It was half empty.

"Hello, Count-a Bruga," Pamphula called gayly, "come in, come in."

"No," Antonica squealed, "I no got-a dressed. Please!" She huddled herself into an attitude of beleaguered modesty.

"Atsa all right, old woman," Pamphula laughed. "He don't mind-a. He see-a worse thing than old woman in night-a gown. Come in. Sit down, I don't see-a you-a long-a time. You busy, hey?"

Hippolyt frowned at this garrulous and hospitable man.

"I will call again," he replied disdainfully, "when you are more fitted to receive company."

He bowed curtly and with a sneer at the modestly huddled figure of Antonica, walked stiffly into the

hall. The door closed. A muffled sound of giggling and scuffling followed him halfway to his loft.

He walked restlessly across his room and stared out of the window. The accidental geometries of back porches, clothes-lines, fences and wall saluted him.

"There are people," he reflected indignantly, "who see in these bedraggled and disorderly shapes which poverty assumes, the soul of a new art. Picasso," he added with a leer, "is a jackass. And so is Stravinsky."

Rodenja Pamphula intruded his bony head.

"He thought he had the drop on me," Hippolyt snorted, "but he won't forget what I told him for a long time. As for Antonica I'll see her in sixty-nine Hells before I lay hands on her again, the big fat fool."

Nevertheless he was restless. He resumed his pacing. It was possible that Rodenja would be leaving soon. He halted, and listened attentively, his ear against the wall. A knock on the door startled him.

"Oh," he muttered, "so she's thought better of it, has she! Well, she'll have something to think about when I finish telling her—this time."

He moved savagely to the door and threw it open. Dr. Smith stood beaming at him.

"What do you want?" Hippolyt demanded.

"I hope I am not disturbing you—or intruding. Dr. Smith ventured genially into the room. He was

carrying a small bundle. He removed his hat and regarded the loft. "Well," he said with decision, "so this is where you live."

"This is where I live," Hippolyt glowered, "but I do not remember inviting you here to inform me of that fact."

Dr. Smith smiled apologies. He cleared his throat, tilted his round head and assumed the attitude of an embarrassed but facetious gentleman.

"It is a penalty of genius, you know," he spoke up, "to be admired. I go to the Metropolitan Museum to admire a great painting. Why not to call on a man who is a great poet? Particularly since I am more fond of poetry than painting. Much more."

Hippolyt swelled visibly under these words. He had never before been sought out in this fashion. It was, accordingly, Dr. Smith's misfortune to receive the full brunt of Hippolyt's accumulated and unexercised sense of inhospitality.

"Your being fond of poetry," he replied, "is a condescension which," he paused and bowed sardonically, "which overwhelms me."

"I consider you one of the three important poets of our time." Dr. Smith deposited these coals of fire in a conciliatory manner.

"Indeed," Hippolyt scowled, "and who are the other two?"

"Well," said the doctor, a bit nervous, "there's Sandburg and—and Ezra Pound."

"Sandburg," Hippolyt replied promptly, "is a

moonstruck bricklayer, who has fallen off a ladder and hurt his head."

"But Pound," Dr. Smith persisted, abandoning Sandburg without further ado, "Pound is thoroughly modern."

"Pound," Hippolyt sneered, "is a yesterday's orchid in the Bloomsbury buttonhole."

Dr. Smith rubbed his hands together enthusiastically.

"Well," he said, "that's certainly putting it cleverly," and stepped boldly into the room. "You know, speaking of poetry," he went on, "I was just rereading Sherwood Anderson's *Mid American Chants* . . ." He broke off with a nervous and inquiring cough.

"Ooh, see the corn, how it aches!" Hippolyt quoted unctuously and smacked his lips; "my, my, how it aches. Ooh, the pretty corn."

"Well," Dr. Smith hesitated to abandon Anderson, "you know, the poetry of the soil is . . ."

"I do not allow people to refer to poetry of the soil in my home," Hippolyt interrupted darkly. He had not moved from his position at the door. Dr. Smith, well in the room, however, felt inspired by this mandate to sit down.

"I've brought along some of your books," he was unwrapping his bundle; "if it wouldn't be asking too much I was hoping you would autograph them."

Hippolyt came forward quickly and regarded the two volumes on the table.

"Where is *Intimate Suggestions?*" he demanded indignantly.

"I tried to get that," Dr. Smith beamed, "but it's out of print."

Dr. Smith offered him a fountain pen.

"Would you mind signing your—your pseudonym also?" he smiled.

Hippolyt, shaking several drops of ink out on his visitor's trousers-leg, wrote on the fly-leaf of each volume,

"To Dr. Smith, a wistful admirer of old orchids and incompetent bricklayers. Count Hippolyt Bruga (Jules Ganz)."

"And the date," cooed Dr. Smith.

"September 29, 1924," Hippolyt inscribed with a flourish.

"It's 1925," Dr. Smith ventured.

"It doesn't make any difference," Hippolyt frowned.

"Well," the lucky visitor gathered his treasures and inspected them proudly, "that's certainly very fine of you." Then, as if resuming a literary debate, he pursued, "What do you think of Carl Van Vechten, by the way?"

"Van Vechten," Hippolyt replied, "is a sensitive barber out of a job."

Dr. Smith thought a moment and then produced the name Aldous Huxley.

"Huxley," the poet smiled, "is a pale debauchee staggering across an endless bedroom under a load of epigrams. At his best," he added, fearful of hav-

ing been misunderstood, "he writes like a rebellious sophomore."

Dr. Smith appeared immensely satisfied.

"That's what I've always felt," he boasted, "although I never quite put it that way."

"No, I guess not," Hippolyt sneered.

"We can't all be poets," his guest apologized. He paused a moment in the catechism and then, brightening once more, went on, "There's a lot of talk this year about this Michael Arlen. . . ."

"There is always a lot of talk," Hippolyt shut him off, "whenever a butler takes to fiction."

Dr. Smith removed his cigarette case from his coat-pocket.

"Have one?" he inquired. Hippolyt replied pointedly that he never smoked strangers' cigarettes.

Dr. Smith took this eccentricity in good part.

"I've always wondered," he lied giddily, lighting his own cigarette, "speaking of the English, you know, if a man of your type admired Henry James."

"I am not interested in constipation," Hippolyt answered, "or its struggles."

"Well," Dr. Smith was a trifle querulous, "whom would you consider a first-rate literary man—or force—today?" He considered this query as important and repeated, "You know, a really first-rate author."

"I am aware of no first-rate literary man or force or author," Hippolyt mimicked his tones, "alive in the world today."

"Your own work," Dr. Smith reminded him insinuatingly.

"We are not discussing present company," Hippolyt frowned.

"Oh, but we are," Dr. Smith was firm.

"If we are," the poet sneered, "you have your answer in my works."

"I see," Dr. Smith essayed a facetious note, "you admit of no rivals."

"I am not accustomed to being insulted in my home." Hippolyt glowered.

"No offense," the unhappy visitor cried, as his host moved toward the door. "It's the farthest thing from my mind, to give offense," he humiliated himself. Mollified, Hippolyt stayed his hand.

"I don't often get a chance," the doctor went on, "to talk to a man like you. For instance, to find out what a real literary creator thinks of the modern school, so called."

"So called of what?" Hippolyt snapped.

"Oh, music, art, literature, you know," Dr. Smith was vague but hopeful. "Vaudeville, even," he added shrewdly.

"The modern school, so called," Hippolyt rolled his eyes, "is a tardy effort to lure the arts out of the whorehouse of emotion. It is the opinion of certain people that literature, painting and music, are capable of providing entertainment superior to the belly dances of the old masters."

"Picasso," Dr. Smith interrupted profoundly,

"and all the vorticists and expressionists. Hm, that's what I thought."

A curious noise drifted out of the wall against which Hippolyt was leaning. He listened for an instant and scowled.

"She makes a noise like a stuck pig," he muttered uncomfortably. With an effort he detached his mind from Antonica.

"What do you think of them, all those movements?" Dr. Smith was asking.

"Who? What movements?" Hippolyt demanded, flushed and abstracted.

"The expressionists, et cetera," his guest replied.

"I am not interested in advertising labels," the poet recovered the carnally interrupted thread of his thought; "the effort to create beauty which will not participate in the lewd circus of the senses is not confined to any school. I, myself, belong to no school." He glowered at his audience and added loudly, "or group, either."

"Of course not." Dr. Smith was indignant at the idea, "but as a modernist, let us say an individual modernist, do you repudiate the so-called works of art which the past has produced? Take music, for instance." He indicated the mantelpiece with a sarcastic hand. "Bayreuth . . ."

"Wagner is one of the fattest girls in the brothel," Hippolyt replied. "His music is like a hysterical female in a rumpled nightgown." The image of Antonica, wrestling for his attention, impelled him

to add viciously, "and what is worse, he's barefooted."

"I see," said Dr. Smith, wrinkling his forehead.

"They are all alike," went on Hippolyt, angry and distracted at the Antonica motif intruding cuckoo-fashion into his æsthetic. "Beethoven, Bizet, Turgenev, Fielding, Titian—all trying to induce the customers to go upstairs with them. The public," he shut his ears grimly to the muffled sounds exuding from the wall, "the public is interested only in fornications. As a result the novel has become a telegram of assignation, painting a mystic chemise for old eyes to fondle, and music struggles to sprinkle a little perfume on tired libidos. The arts," he concluded savagely, "are sexual—fat and sexual."

Dr. Smith raised his eyebrows.

"Don't you think women are responsible for this state of affairs?" he inquired indignantly. "For instance, I have a couple of friends, two very intelligent young women, whose interest in literature, as I pointed out to them the other night, is purely sensual."

"What do they read?" Hippolyt demanded.

"Well," his guest answered nervously, "they're great admirers of your work."

Hippolyt closed his eyes and sighed.

"In fact," Dr. Smith went on, encouraged by his host's unexpected tolerance, "I rather half promised that I'd introduce them to you. Harriet in particular."

"What kind of a young woman is she?" Hippolyt stroked his chin with suppressed excitement.

"Oh, very intellectual," Dr. Smith began.

"Intellect in women," Hippolyt interrupted irritably, "is not an essential—or even interesting quality. I will supply all the intellect necessary . . . I mean, what sort of a looking woman is she? Pretty?" he demanded with an abrupt scowl.

"Beautiful," said Dr. Smith simply.

"Modern?" pursued Hippolyt.

"Thoroughly emancipated, no repressions," his guest agreed eagerly. "She's often talked to me about you. In fact, she went so far as to write your publisher for a photograph of you."

"Oh, boy!" Hippolyt exclaimed unexpectedly, "did—did he send it?"

"She never even got a reply," Dr. Smith murmured with pathos.

"She didn't, eh?" Hippolyt cried. "Well, you just wait. I'll fix him for that. That's the way he treats me, is it . . . I'll fix him."

He opened a drawer in the table and fumbled among its littered contents.

"I've only got a head," he scowled, "the full-length ones are all gone."

"Oh, that'll be just as good," the doctor hoped.

"Anyway, the face is larger on just the heads," Hippolyt muttered, and produced a gloss print of himself. "What's her whole name?" he demanded.

"Harriet Langweiler."

"Give me your fountain pen," he went on, "hurry up."

Dr. Smith produced his pen and leaped out of his seat as the poet shook it violently in the air. Having sprinkled the table satisfactorily with ink, Hippolyt wrote on the publicity-sticker attached to the photograph.

"To Harriet Langweiler, whose name is a wistful promise of Happiness. Count Hippolyt Bruga (Jules Ganz). September 29, 1927."

"Where does she live?" He looked up, his tongue protruding from the corner of his mouth.

"I was just thinking," Dr. Smith was roguish, "that we might call on them some evening."

"What's the matter with now?" Hippolyt demanded indignantly. "My evenings are usually taken," he added.

Dr. Smith considered.

"That's right, it's Saturday," he said, "and they're sure to be home."

"What kind of a looking one is the other one?" The poet hesitated with sudden shrewdness before placing the photograph in his worn leather briefcase.

"Oh, she's all right," Dr. Smith began. "She's . . ."

"That's enough," sneered Hippolyt, and thrust the print into the case. "Wait until I fix up."

He began to whistle loudly and tunelessly, as he polished his silk hat with a handkerchief.

"Has she got a copy of *Microscopic Sommer-*

salts?" he inquired suddenly, as he plastered his hair down with liberal doses of vaseline.

"Yes, of course," Dr. Smith replied promptly.

"Well, I'll take her another," Hippolyt was munificent.

"It will certainly be interesting," Dr. Smith had risen and was watching the frenzied toilette of the inspired poet, "to introduce a great author to a woman destined, perhaps, to be his love."

"We are not discussing love," Hippolyt turned from the mirror; "love is a meaningless union of illusions."

"That's very much like Harriet's idea," Dr. Smith chuckled, "she thinks that real love is chemical."

"Come on," cried Hippolyt. His brief-case and cane in hand he dashed for the door and repeated from the hallway, "Come on. Hurry up."

Dr. Smith, gathering up his treasured volumes in which the eccentric poet had inscribed his name, arrived on the threshold to find him halfway down the stairs. His host was waiting for him on the pavement.

"How far is it?" he demanded eagerly. Dr. Smith consulted a small note book. Hippolyt stood by, grimacing his impatience.

"They'll go away," he scowled, "hurry up."

"Just a minute. I want to make sure of the address," his guide apologized. "This is really an adventure," he added, turning the page.

Hippolyt drew a deep breath and fidgeted. The vision of a languishing and beautiful admirer was,

in his present state, almost too much for him. He tugged the Doctor's elbow.

"Well, well," he glowered, "is it going to take you all year?"

"Ah, here they are," Dr. Smith had discovered the address; "we'll take a taxi."

Hippolyt dashed into the middle of the street and waved his arms frantically at an approaching cab.

"Hey! Hey!" he bellowed. "Here, taxi!"

The cab turned out to prevent running him down and slowed up. Hippolyt pursued it eagerly to the curb where it had halted. He arrived panting as the cab door opened and Officers Mullins and Miller crowded out. Hippolyt, in his excitement, failed to recognize his erstwhile captors. Oblivious of them, he was struggling to shove past their figures into the cab.

"Hey, that's him!" Officer Mullins cried out.

Officer Miller pulled him back with a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Got here just in time," he exclaimed.

Hippolyt, staggering backward to the pavement, turned wrathfully.

"What's the idea, you big bums!" he cried. His face, as he recognized the two detectives, underwent an immediate change. He drew himslf up and stared aloofly at them.

"We been lookin' for you for a week," Officer Miller sneered. "Thought you could hide away, huh?"

Dr. Smith attempted to intercede. His words

were lost for the moment during a sudden outburst of profanity from the poet.

"What's the matter, Mullins?" he finally managed to make himself heard.

"Plenty," Officer Mullins answered, "the Lieutenant wants this guy—pronto."

"What Lieutenant?" Hippolyt shouted.

"McTavish," Officer Miller began.

"Tell Lieutenant McTavish," Hippolyt spoke coldly, "that I will call on him this evening. I've got an important engagement now."

"I'll say you have," Officer Mullins was sinister. "Go on. Pile in now. If you know what's good for you."

Thus plucked out of the paradise which, a moment ago, had enfolded him, Hippolyt gritted his teeth, and with a prodigious scowl stared wildly about him.

"All right, Jim?" Officer Miller cried.

The detectives leaped at him with surprising agility.

"Pin his arms. I got him. The bracelets quick. You will, will you . . ."

Hippolyt, again in the smothering embrace of the law, struggled savagely, filling the street with his howls. A violent shove sent him sprawling manacled and helpless into the cab. The silk hat rolled off on to the seat.

"Come along if you want to," Officer Miller addressed the indignant and bewildered Dr. Smith. Dusting his hands he continued to the chauffeur,

"Back to the Central Station now. Fast as you can make it."

XIV

Lieutenant McTavish gritted his teeth and brought his fist down on his desk.

"Who," he demanded for the twentieth time, "is Amelia?"

Hippolyt sunk in a chair, scowled and remained silent.

"There is nothing to be gained," McTavish reflected, controlling himself with difficulty, "from a man who looks at you with poisonous eyes."

His hand moved wearily to the back of his head.

"We know that you have been looking for this woman," he went on, "ever since the murder. What are you looking for her for?"

"There are things," Hippolyt broke his silence, "one does not discuss with a policeman."

McTavish jumped to his feet and shook his finger in the poet's face.

"One more remark like that," he shouted, "and—and . . ."

His words trailed off and he stood blushing.

"This whole business is undermining me," he mumbled and sat down. "I've never been like this before."

He turned dejectedly to a pile of loose papers on his desk. They contained notes. He picked up one of them and read:

"Imperative. Ask him what connection Amelia and Panini.

2. Ask him who Panini's enemies.

3. Ask him why he keeps up search for Amelia.

4. Imperative. Ask him who is Amelia."

McTavish crumpled the sheet and dropped it into the cuspidor.

"Their lawyer has demanded an autopsy," he remarked suddenly. "So we've got to exhume the body. I had to send to Springview and have it dug up again."

Hippolyt stared impassively at the carpet.

"What objection have you got to helping me?" McTavish went on querulously. "Why can't you tell me who this Amelia is? We've got to find someone who was close to Panini. Did you ever hear him mention Mrs. Winterbottom?"

"No," said Hippolyt coldly.

"That's better," McTavish sighed, "if you'll only answer my questions we'll get along. I forgot to ask you before, you were the last person to see Panini alive. Did he say anything at that time, anything significant?"

"No," said Hippolyt.

"What were your relations with this missing woman, Amelia?" McTavish inquired abruptly. The poet resumed his impassive ogling of the carpet. "All right," McTavish added hurriedly, "we'll

forget about her for a while. We'll find her ourselves."

He leaned back dejectedly in his chair.

"I had an idea you could help me," he muttered. "I need help."

"I am not a detective," Hippolyt sneered.

"Spiritual help," McTavish waved his hand, "psychology."

"What do you wish to know?" Hippolyt inquired tolerantly.

"I've been talking to this man every day," McTavish went on, "Winterbottom!" the name exploded on his lips. "Professor Oliver Winterbottom!" He thrust his pile of notes back and glowered.

"The murderer," Hippolyt prompted after a silence.

Lieutenant McTavish arose and closed the door. He turned and studied his visitor unhappily.

"He's driving me crazy," he announced. "I never knew a criminal before who could drive me crazy. He and his wife. And their God damn lawyer. Exhume the body. Look for poison. Of all the red herrings. But I don't mind that. It's Winterbottom!"

"Hasn't he confessed yet?" Hippolyt inquired aloofly.

McTavish's voice again escaped his control.

"I don't want him to confess," he shouted. "I don't need his confession." He waved his hand at the desk. "The evidence is complete."

"Then why are you so upset?" Hippolyt smiled elatedly.

"You've seen him," McTavish went on, "you've heard him talk. You heard what he said when we arrested him. Well, that's nothing. He's worse. His wife's gotten worse."

"Professor Winterbottom," Hippolyt interrupted, "is a liar. Is that anything unusual?"

"It's not his lies I object to," McTavish sighed and sat down, "it's his psychology. It's the way he looks down on crime. He keeps on pretending that he's the kind of a man who couldn't do wrong. He refers to me as Satan. It's his character," McTavish scowled miserably, "I can't stand it. I try to keep my temper when I talk to him but . . ."

"It is too bad," Hippolyt spoke slowly, "that Mr. Winterbottom is not innocent. I would much prefer him to be innocent."

McTavish stared.

"If he were innocent," Hippolyt continued with sudden viciousness, "then his arrest and execution would be ideal."

"I am not hounding an innocent man," McTavish cried indignantly, "that's a lie. He's guiltier than hell."

"He is guilty either of committing a murder," Hippolyt ignored the interruption, "in which case, if I were you, I would at once turn him loose. I do not understand why a man who courageously kills another man who has wronged him can be regarded as an enemy of society. Having revenged

himself it is obvious that he bears no further grudge against society and that locking him up or executing him in order to prevent him inflicting further injury is a false and malicious action. Or," Hippolyt concluded his parenthesis with a scowl, "he is guilty of something worse—of being, as he so loudly protests, a virtuous and moral citizen. A virtuous and moral citizen," continued the poet judiciously, "is a perpetual crime against reason. It is only in rare and enlightened moments of the world's history, however, that such a man receives his just deserts."

Lieutenant McTavish shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He was worried about Mullins and Miller who were waiting outside the door to learn the results of his cross-examination. Nevertheless, the poet's words, in view of the situation, were curiously refreshing.

"I would hardly call that a tenable working theory," he glanced nervously at the door, "although I quite understand it. Nietzschean, isn't it?"

"My ideas," frowned Hippolyt, "are my own. I do not like to talk to people who misinterpret your remarks into their favorite proverbs."

McTavish smiled wearily, conscious that it was his first smile in two weeks. He glanced guiltily at his pile of notes and sighed.

"It's all right to hate Winterbottom," he replied settling deeper into his chair, "but what would become of us if we didn't regard human life as precious?"

"Human life," Hippolyt answered coldly, "is not

precious. It has certain qualities which are interesting and even piquant. But in itself it is of no consequence. The fact that ten million were killed to no purpose and for no reason in a recent war proves, if it proves anything, that human life is considered less important than the fugitive delusions which excite it to slaughter. However, I do not care to discuss this matter—with a policeman."

Hippolyt, recalling his wrongs, bared his teeth in an unexpected grimace of rage. Lieutenant McTavish blushed.

"The only reason I am a policeman," he answered testily, "is because it's an easy way to earn a living. I have not a policeman's mind."

"Policemen have no minds," Hippolyt was firm. "They are the blind instruments used by society to protect itself against all reasonable and natural assault. If it weren't for policemen such creatures as Mr. Winterbottom would be killed in droves—daily. It is only the thought of policemen that prevents me from doing it myself."

Lieutenant McTavish frowned. "I am not philosophically an enemy of crime. That's why I can't stand this Winterbottom's protests. He acts as if crime were something depraved and unnatural. I've seen a lot better criminals than him," he added spitefully and irrelevantly.

Hippolyt was silent for a moment.

"I am almost convinced of his innocence," he announced abruptly. He slapped his knee repeatedly

with his palm and an expression of delight suffused his face.

"The theory is ridiculous!" McTavish was angry. "The evidence against him is conclusive. We have even discovered that he . . ."

"I am not interested in your evidence," Hippolyt sneered. "I am interested in Winterbottom."

"What makes you think he's innocent?" McTavish demanded unhappily.

"A virtuous and moral citizen," Hippolyt replied, "can always be distinguished by his misconceptions of life. Mr. Winterbottom is not horrified at the thought of Panini's murder. He is horrified at the thought of crime. He is a moralistic and pious man, which means that his character is based on a repugnance toward life. All honest phenomena are, therefore, revolting to him. His horror of crime is merely part of his horror of intelligence. He has, you will find, an equal horror of vital literature, great art and all honorable revelations of the secrets and beauties of life. Crime," continued Hippolyt warmly, "is a phenomenon which reminds Mr. Winterbottom of the fact that life is more real than himself. I have an unerring instinct for detecting a virtuous and moral citizen. Mr. Winterbottom is as unmistakable as a polecat. The odor of his sanctity is authentic and like the polecat, while exuding it, he is inordinately proud of his beautiful fur which has a white stripe on it and is used for making expensive wraps."

"Virtue and morality . . ." began McTavish eagerly.

Hippolyt, having caught his breath, interrupted him.

"Virtue and morality," he went on, "are a species of insanity which enables weak minds to live by repudiating the evidence of their senses and outlawing all the inhospitable data of Nature. Mr. Winterbottom would be almost as horrified by the poetry I write as he is by the more concrete charges you have made against him."

McTavish had lighted his pipe and was smoking excitedly.

"But," he exclaimed, "that doesn't prove him innocent. There are facts. We must stick to facts or philosophy is worthless."

"It is philosophy that makes facts worthless," Hippolyt answered. "Your facts are the clumsy details of physical search. Mine are of the mind. Mr. Winterbottom," he added gleefully, "is innocent. His innocence is so vast, so horrible, however, that he will become the victim of an ideal miscarriage of justice. He will be executed for his unreality."

McTavish stared disconsolately at the poet.

"Have you any theory about the actual crime, then?" he asked uneasily. "That is, any reasonable theory as to how Panini was murdered and all the evidence fastened on this Winterbottom?"

"I never indulge in unreasonable remarks," frowned Hippolyt.

"I mean, what do you think?" McTavish apologized.

Again a curious light spread over Hippolyt's face. An excitement appeared to take possession of him. His eyes grew fanatic and his voice trembled with an odd, authoritative inflection. Lieutenant McTavish, as he listened to the astonishing answer, was irritably aware that the poet was speaking in the manner ascribed to seers and prophets.

"If a Chicago waiter," Hippolyt began, "would try to poison seventy-five virtuous and moral citizens at a banquet for the simple reason that he considered them criminals, what would a more sensitive and ironical man like Panini do? Horrified by Puritans and disgusted by this particular example of Puritanism which happened to land under his nose he would do just that. Poison him. Poison him in such a way as to make his soul writhe, his hair stand up and his platitudes eat into his heart. He would do this in the only way possible, not by making him the victim of a crime which would merely add a crown of flattering thorns to his sanctity but by making him the perpetrator of a crime. It is exactly what I would do," he concluded triumphantly, "to a man like Winterbottom if I resented him too much."

"You mean Panini did it?" McTavish banged his pipe violently against the cuspidor.

"Yes," Hippolyt answered.

"How?" the lieutenant demanded, "are you mad?"

"Mr. Winterbottom is innocent," Hippolyt re-

peated happily and sank back into his chair in a manner which indicated that the discussion was ended. A knock on the door interrupted the Lieutenant's irritable comment.

"Come in," he cried. His hair rumpled, he arose, puffing obliviously on his emptied pipe. Officer Mullins entered.

"Hello, Chief," he closed the door carefully behind him, "I thought I'd drop in and find out what you got out of him."

"Who?" McTavish blinked.

"Him," Officer Mullins nodded at the poet, "did he come across with the dope on Amelia? Miller and I was figurin' . . ."

McTavish concealed his returning sense of gunt in an authoritative frown.

"No," he interrupted, "nothing new."

"If you would like, Miller and we would just as soon question him," Officer Mullins offered with a sinister wink. "That is, if you're all through. You know there's more ways than one of making guys like him listen to reason."

McTavish scratched the back of his head while his subordinate glowered at the impassive poet.

"It's funny," he said after a pause, "that they should both be named Amelia."

"Who is that woman?" Officer Mullins demanded sharply and advancing upon Hippolyt seized him by the shoulder. A commotion at the door interrupted his purpose. Two policemen in plain clothes followed by three less pronounced-looking citizens

filed in. McTavish regarded the delegation without enthusiasm. He turned to the redder of the two detectives whom he had dispatched to exhume Panini's remains.

"Well," he inquired wearily, "where'd you take the body?"

"We didn't take the body no place," Sergeant Wiley answered. "I want to introduce these here men before I make my report, Chief. This is Mr. Henrotin who's the superintendent in charge of the Springview Cemetery. And this is his two helpers, Mr. Brown and Mr. Schneider."

Sergeant Wiley made these announcements ominously and removed his hat. McTavish, with a vague nod at the gentlemen, continued to stare at him.

"What's the matter?" he inquired irritably.

"There wasn't no body," the sergeant answered. Mr. Henrotin offered a corroborating sigh.

"What!" McTavish removed his pipe. "Where'd you go?" he added indignantly. "I told you to go . . ."

"We went," Sergeant Wiley interrupted. "That's where we went. We went where the body was."

"Well?" McTavish demanded.

"That's where we went," Sergeant Wiley was dogged, "where Panini was buried. I took the wagon," he indicated the door. "Schultz is outside. He drove us out. He didn't wanna come in because he's all upset. He got a bad shock. You know how he is, Chief?"

"Someone has rifled Panini's grave," Mr. Henrotin spoke up in a thin, suave voice. He removed an imaginary speck of dust from his eye as the lieutenant stared at him.

"Ghouls," added Mr. Schneider. Mr. Schneider was employed at the cemetery as a grave digger.

"We went out there," Sergeant Wiley resumed, "me and Bill here. We went out there. Schultz drove us out in the wagon. He's all upset. The shock was almost too much for him . . ."

"What happened?" McTavish shouted and sat down. "Never mind about him. God damn it."

"There was no indication of anything," Mr. Henrotin, still nervously intent upon cleaning his eye, explained soothingly. "Hans here was over the grounds this morning," he indicated Mr. Schneider.

"Yeah, I was over the grounds. There was nothing wrong," Mr. Schneider nodded. "It was ghouls."

"We started diggin' as soon as we got there," Sergeant Wiley went on. "There was no sign of nothin' wrong. The grave was all right. In about a half-hour we come to the coffin. Schultz was helpin' us. He didn't wanna but we made him get off the wagon on account of there bein' enough shovels to go around. He was helpin' us . . ."

McTavish, staring abstractedly at the wall, encountered Hippolyt.

"Wait a minute," he gestured the policeman to stop talking, but Sergeant Wiley once started on his awful narrative was incapable of interruption.

"And we lifted up the coffin," he went on, "not expectin' nothin'. There was no signs somebody had been there."

"Ghouls don't leave no signs," Mr. Schneider threw in authoritatively.

"And when we got the coffin up with the ropes we opened it and there was nobody inside. The body was gone. The coffin was empty. Completely. And Schultz . . ."

"Have the newspapers got hold of this yet?" McTavish asked dully.

"No, we come right here," said the sergeant, "we looked around for about a half-hour hopin' the body would be somewhere's else."

"Sometimes they drop it," Mr. Schneider explained.

"Yeah, ghouls," Sergeant Wiley nodded. "But they didn't. They took it away with them."

"We would rather this wouldn't get into the papers," Mr. Henrotin mopped his face with a large handkerchief; "it would seem like a reflection on us. In our thirty years of service we have never had an occurrence of this nature. You may rest assured, Lieutenant, that we will find the body. Our organization . . ."

"Go outside," McTavish stood up, "and don't say anything. Not a word to anybody. Tell Schultz to wait. This is terrible."

He stared about him as the delegation filed out.

"Wait here, Mullins."

McTavish closed the door and turned to Hippolyt.

"You heard," he began.

"I was thinking of something else," Hippolyt answered coolly.

"I want your word of honor as a gentleman," McTavish exclaimed, "that you won't mention this thing to anybody."

"I am willing to compromise," Hippolyt smiled. "If you will instruct this simian to leave me alone." He frowned in Officer Mullins's direction.

"That's all right," McTavish agreed nervously. Officer Mullins had apparently ignored the epithet. He was staring at his cigar.

Hippolyt's thought during the past five minutes had become alive with echoes of Sarastro's babblings.

"You know," he resumed, "that without the body of Panini it will be difficult to convict Mr. Winterbottom."

"That's applesauce." Officer Mullins came out of his meditations. "It's only when there ain't no body at all. The corpus delicto has been established in this case."

"Oh, has it?" Hippolyt murmured. "Well, I happen to know better."

"We want to keep it a secret a while," McTavish interrupted.

"What do you mean, you know better?" Officer Mullins demanded. "There's fifty people saw the body. That's the same as if it was still dead."

"There are fifty thousand people who have seen Signor Panini saw a woman in half," Hippolyt replied, "and there are fifty million people who at

some time in their lives have seen witches, hobgoblins and ghosts."

Officer Mullins turned away in disgust. McTavish, however, appeared suddenly interested.

"Have you got some theory?" he began.

"Yes," said Hippolyt, "the body of Signor Panini is missing for a very good reason."

"What, why?" McTavish demanded.

"Because," the poet pursued, delighted with his dramatic information, "because it never exsited."

"This guy," Officer Mullins lost his temper, "is the nuttiest pretzel-duster I ever bumped into. Now listen, Chief . . ."

McTavish signaled him to be silent. He was regarding the poet intently.

"I have been interested in your theories," he said plaintively, "and it hardly seems fair for you to make such a preposterous statement . . ."

"He's nuts," cried Officer Mullins.

"However," went on McTavish, "it has taught me a lesson . . ."

"Signor Panini," Hippolyt interrupted, "is not dead. He is alive and well and enjoying himself at our expense. The body that was found in the trunk, the gun going off in the hands of a seemingly dead man, in fact, everything connected with the incident was part of an illusion. An enchantment," he gleefully echoed Sarastro's babblings, "cast by a strange and evil man—Signor Panini."

"Are you goin' to lock him up?" Officer Mullins demanded of his superior.

"No," said McTavish, "go out and tell Schultz I'm going to the cemetery."

Officer Mullins slammed the door as he went out.

"I am disappointed in you," Lieutenant McTavish muttered, closing his desk. "A few moments ago I was highly interested in your remarks. But this . . ." He shrugged his shoulders with disgust.

"You mean you were impressed by my statement that Mr. Winterbottom is innocent?" Hippolyt inquired.

McTavish corrected him.

"By your reasoning," he answered.

"I am not the victim of reason, my own or anyone else's," Hippolyt explained. He arose and calmly fitted the battered silk hat on his head.

"The fact that Signor Panini is not dead," he went on, "is obviously a further proof of Mr. Winterbottom's innocence. Although I am not in the habit of giving my word of honor to a policeman," he bowed slowly, "you need not worry about my talking to anyone about this. Being convinced of Mr. Winterbottom's innocence I shall do all in my power to see that he is executed."

"Do you know where this Sarastro lives?" McTavish inquired suddenly.

"No," said Hippolyt.

Stepping into the corridor he inquired excitedly of Officer Mullins:

"Have you seen Dr. Smith?"

"Dr. Smith went home an hour ago," Officer Mullins answered coldly and turned to follow his

superior. A prodigious frown wrinkled Hippolyt's nose.

"He could have waited for me," he muttered, and with a savage thrust of his cane at the swinging office-gate walked indignantly out of the station.

XV

In the three weeks that ensued Hippolyt almost starved to death. The reason and manner of his misfortune were as follows:

Rodenja Pamphula, wearied of illicit conquests, had suddenly turned to his wife as the only surviving novelty in the neighborhood. Excited by the delusion that Antonica was now the single virtuous matron of his acquaintance, this predatory roué developed a perverse and fanatic interest in his mate, wooed her with vast enthusiasm, transformed her hitherto-lonely household into a honeymooners' nest and reveled secretly in the curious fact that here in his long-neglected home he had inexplicably come into his own as a despoiler of womanhood.

Virtue is a spice immemorially favored by Don Juans. And Pamphula's highly developed instinct for immorality found a tremendous fillip in the companionship of a woman as virtuous and honorable as he fancied his wife. The ensuing phenomenon that, unlike his other paramours, the more he embraced

her the more virtuous and honorable she became, inspired this libidinous Cuban with notions too involved for his simple mental processes. He was aware merely of the stimulating influence which virtue invariably exercises on the jaded senses and without further ado abandoned himself happily to the fact that there was something more depraved in associating with his own wife than there had been in associating with the wives of other men.

This deplorable insight into the soul of a roué is offered chiefly for its devastating effects upon the fortunes of our hero. . . . Hippolyt, like some innocent bystander, found himself suddenly brought low by the Pamphula reunion. Antonica was lost to him and with her the life-sustaining stews and roasts that had been the price of the seigneurial consolations dear to a neglected wife.

Driven by his first pangs of hunger to another assault upon the Pamphula door, he found Antonica alone and incorruptible. She appeared, in fact, not only to have recovered, but improved her original status as a virtuous and faithful wife. For the virtue of a woman renews itself phœnixlike in her good intentions. What was worse, moreover, she confronted Hippolyt with the true anger of the repentant for a sinful past. Seizing a broom, she menaced her argumentative visitor until he retreated bitterly into the hallway. Here rendered almost violent by the savory odors from Antonica's kitchen Hippolyt contemplated for a moment a more direct assault upon the Pamphula dinner. He could, he

glowered angrily at the closing door, sweep this treacherous and ungrateful creature off her feet; rush into the kitchen, seize the two pots bubbling on the gas stove and be safely at his own table before she had time to pick herself up. The moment for action, however, passed. Hippolyt returned to his loft hungrier than he had been when he left it.

He cursed himself to sleep after finishing two herrings bought with his last fifteen cents and awoke with an oath still on his lips. He tossed in his bed until noon, lingered over his toilet an hour and then, unable to dally any longer with the demands of his stomach, clattered voraciously down the stairs into the street.

He visited three studios in a frantic hope of discovering an afternoon tea in progress but encountered instead a discussion of George Antheil's music, a project for the launching of a new literary magazine, and a comparison of amatory adventures between a native tenor and a visiting English author. He lingered at this third, determined to shame a dinner-invitation out of his host. Toward five o'clock, however, his host unexpectedly expressed a fear that he would be late for an important engagement and hinted that a woman highly esteemed by all present was even then waiting eagerly for him at the Ritz. At this information Hippolyt astonished the company with a burst of profanity and, seizing his hat, left in a state of high indignation.

Fifteen minutes later he arrived at the studio of

a woman illustrator in time to participate in the remains of a dainty collation. The sandwiches were all gone, but his hostess, a resourceful woman, produced a box of animal crackers. These Hippolyt devoured with an enthusiasm which for a time sidetracked a discussion of the late Mr. Sargent's status as an artist.

Night found him giddy and voracious. During the days that followed he managed to keep alive on a fare of lettuce sandwiches, pekoe tea and occasional slices of cake. Rushing from one studio to another with an increasing disregard for the niceties of convention, his appearances became more and more an alarming and crucial matter among his hostesses. Between raids on these semi-public functions he made persistent efforts to locate Dr. Smith. Failing in these he fell to calling daily at the police station and demanding to see Lieutenant McTavish. The lieutenant, however, was busy elsewhere on the Panini case. He encountered Officers Mullins and Miller one afternoon on the station steps and seized with the hope of being arrested, thrown into a cell and fed, began badgering them loudly. This resulted in nothing more tangible than a repeated threat of physical assault which, in his weakened condition, he decided to avoid. Accordingly he fled.

He sought out his publisher with demands for advance royalties, he made the rounds of the magazine offices, his worn brief-case stuffed with poems to sell, he answered two want ads in the newspapers in which an elderly man and a middle-aged

woman inquired for a traveling companion to accompany them respectively to Paris and to Florida. Nothing came of his activities. He grew hourly thinner, dirtier and hungrier.

Perhaps the most curious factor in the situation was his pride. It was not Jules Ganz who was starving slowly to death but Count Hippolyt Bruga. Never, in fact, had he felt himself so much a nobleman as during these days of suffering. Grimly he clung to this illusion and in its grip found himself unable either to beg or to unbend and confide his difficulties to the gloating ear of democracy. His hauteur increased with his faintness, his arrogance fed upon the convulsions that shook his body.

Unaware that they were witnessing the romantic spectacle of a poet in the throes of famine, those who observed Hippolyt during these days considered his grim and savage antics an attempt to impress them with the eccentricity of genius. Never even in his heyday as Jules Ganz had he managed to create so unanimous and widespread a feeling of indignation as now. This fact, however, appeared to afford him a brutal pleasure. He would rather have cut his throat than have revealed the despair of his soul. From which it may be seen that though the title he had conferred upon himself was spurious, there was in his strange nature that implacable pride which has wrapped whole eras of aristocracy in the robes of mystery and glamour.

He grew too weak to shave, too desperate to concern himself any longer with the condition of his

battered silk hat, his blackened linen, torn shoes and mud-spattered Prince-Albert. Hollow-eyed and unkempt he continued to wander the streets, delirious images of Amelia comforting him, scraps of food filched from restaurant alleys sustaining him. Toward the end of the second week a terror seized him. He began to think he would die without finding Amelia. This was more intolerable than the pains of his body. He resumed his search for her.

He had now given up the studios as a result of the belligerent inhospitality his arrivals inspired. His last raid upon an afternoon tea ended in a brawl. Infuriated by the discussion of cooking-recipes in which the guests had unaccountably indulged for a half-hour, he arose giddily and denounced them for a pack of bourgeoise gourmets whose brains were in their bellies. Invective and insult poured from his blue lips for a full ten minutes. A battle ensued. Hippolyt, bleeding at the nose, his eye blackened, his collar torn, staggered hysterically out of the front door, and pausing only to smash a window with his cane turned his back contemptuously on Bohemia.

The end of the third week found him walking slowly in the night, his famished body supported by his stick, his thoughts reeling, darkness flickering before his hollowed eyes. An inspiration had penetrated the delirium of his senses. He was on his way to Madam Williger's.

He was conscious as he crept along of a curious transformation overtaking the dark streets. He

cursed bitterly at the phenomena which assailed his bloodshot eyes. The walls of buildings stretched themselves into attenuated towers whose roofs vanished amid the stars. He sneered savagely as he contemplated them. Windows became a swarm of varicolored, spinning discs. The pavements grew bulbous and rubbery under his feet and the night became crowded with a tolling of bells. He moved on, feeble and glowering, chewing on a dusty cigar-butt. An hour later he slid to the ground, his head colliding with a water plug, and lay unconscious, his fingers clutching the silver handle of his cane.

In the course of time he was found by a couple returning to their home from the theater. A policeman was summoned. The clothes of the unconscious man were searched for identification and address. Innumerable sheets of carefully folded paper were removed from his pockets. Holding them to the light of a street lamp the baffled constable read on the first:

"To Amelia,

My heart is a silver bell that hangs motionless . . ."

On the second were the words:

"To Amelia,

The night sharpens its claws upon my heart . . ."

On a third was written:

"To Amelia,

The memory of your smile is a throne before which I kneel endlessly . . ."

"Po'try," said the policeman in an awed voice, "poor guy."

He was still emptying the pockets of the unconscious man when a pedestrian joined the nocturnal group around the water plug. He stared at the bearded and dilapidated figure for a moment and then with a cry announced his name.

"Count Bruga, Excellenz!" he shook the stiffened shoulder. "He is my friend," he continued excitedly to the policeman, "call a cab. We will take him home."

Thus it befell that Hippolyt, his mouth tasting unexpectedly of whisky, awoke the next morning to find the Marvelous Sarastro sitting beside his cot in Pamphula's loft and holding a steaming bowl of food solicitously under his nose.

XVI

It was night. Sarastro, his large, womanish eyes glittering like a cat's in the candle-lighted loft, was talking. Hippolyt lay on the cot, which for the first time in weeks no longer resembled a rubbish dump. He had eaten. His body was slowly growing warm. A lassitude filled him. He had questioned Sarastro concerning his collapse, demanded faintly but indignantly that his clothes be searched to see if anything had been stolen during the hour of his unconscious-

ness and finally, after finishing another dish of food, had apparently lost interest in his Samaritan. He lay through the day, pains disturbing his body and a torpor in his mind.

Sarastro had remained. He busied himself straightening the loft and attending the convalescent but morose poet. He swept together bushel after bushel of papers, ashes, dust, rags and meat bones. He attacked and vanquished the mantelpiece, poured lye in the sink, restored after an hour of scrubbing the transparency of the windows, and towards evening lighted six separate cones of incense. Rodenja Pamphula attracted by these unusual sounds of activity had appeared with inquiries and on learning that his lordly tenant was ill had hurried off and returned out of breath with a bottle of his celebrated Golden Elixir. Hippolyt, awakened from a dose and tendered this medicinal gift, had flown into a feeble rage and ordered Sarastro out of his sight.

The Samaritan had withdrawn discreetly to his labors, hiding the bottle, and after several hours, perceiving that the invalid was now awake, had begun talking. He had talked of what was on his mind—Panini, the mystery of his death, the possibility of his still being alive a fact of which, he hinted darkly, he had not yet despaired despite "certain things." Now he was sitting beside the cot and he was still talking.

"If we are to live together," he leaned forward in the half-dark, "and I think it would be good for both of us if we were friends henceforth and shared

this place—if we are to live together," he repeated, there being no denial of the project from the recumbent figure, "it is well that I should tell you the reason for my hatred of Panini. It is because I hate him so, that I do not want him dead. If he is dead he has cheated me out of all that I have lived for—the pleasure of killing him. Hate," he continued, as the poet showed a slight interest in his words, "is not an emotion, Excellenz. It is a soul which sometimes enters a man. He may live on as if nothing had happened and to his friends he may seem unchanged. But his soul has only one color, his nights have only one dream. It is thus I have hated Panini—for twenty years."

A vague smile appeared on the wasted face of the poet.

"I do not like tales of vengeance," he murmured, "unless they are interesting."

"It is interesting," Sarastro answered softly. Hippolyt nodded his head, and closing his eyes listened without interruption to the strange narrative that followed.

"Panini," went on Sarastro, "was an evil man. That was his secret. You knew him as a brilliant and successful charlatan. Gay, proud, smiling. Yes, he smiled, he bowed, he laughed, but always alone. Life fled from him as children flee from a darkened room. He belonged to nobody. The world through which he kept moving was always a stranger to him. He tried hard to find friendship and love. But he could not. If you came close to him attracted by

his proud and lonely smile you felt the breath of evil. And he found nothing in life because of this. But he stole what was denied him. He crawled into heaven for a little while within the souls of others.

"Twenty years ago," Sarastro resumed, after a long silence, "I was a young man. I traveled with a small carnival through the villages of Southeastern Europe. We were a company of clowns, gypsies, acrobats and conjurors. We traveled in gilded wagons, and performed for peasants and herdsmen on the outskirts of their villages.

"My powers developed early. I was young, but I was able to cast horoscopes, foretell the future, reveal the past and converse with the gnomes and salamanders. I wore black tights and a small black jacket that came only to my waist. There was always a sword at my side, for in dealing with the spirits that infest the darkness beyond life one must always be armed. I was known as the Black Seer, and it was not only the peasants who held me in awe. My comrades themselves feared and respected me.

"One night we came to a village in Malo-Russia. Our cymbals sounded, our music played, our torches flickered in the spring wind, and the villagers crowded around our tents and wagons. I had taken my place in the black box on the platform outside my tent. There were holes in the box through which I could watch the crowd while the barker made his announcements. He ran up and down the platform, ringing his bell and shouting 'The Black Seer, the Marvel of Marvels, Sarastro the Magician, who

speaks with the dead and reads the secrets of life . . .'

"I saw her for the first time at this moment. Her young and gentle face surprised me among so many peasants. I said to myself, 'What a strange girl! What a beautiful child!' In a short while I began my performance in the tent. But I was restless. I kept watching the entrance. At length an old peasant led her in, holding her by the hand. I saw at once that she was blind.

"The old man led her to my side and asked that I tell her fortune. He said she was his daughter, but it needed no knowledge of the stars to see that he lied. I questioned him and learned her simple history. She had been born blind and cast aside as an infant by a tyrant-noble of the vicinity and she had been found and raised by this old man and his wife.

"I studied her face as he talked. Pure as a seraph's, her large sightless eyes calm, resigned. She was eighteen and beautiful, pale, delicate, noble. But that does not describe her. It is in the eyes that the soul of a woman is usually to be seen. Anna's eyes were empty. She could neither see nor be seen by them. But the spirit which found these eyes closed lighted the rest of her face and body. A kindly, radiant child spoke from her lips. I held her white hands which she had offered me trustingly and I cast her horoscope. A dark mist passed over me and I listened to the voices which foretell the

future. 'Sorrow, sorrow,' they breathed, 'pain and sorrow. Fly . . . run . . .'

"But I smiled and my own voice was serene as I spoke.

" 'The spirits promise you happiness,' I told her, 'your hands will touch beautiful things. Love and delight await you.'

"I was rewarded for my lies by a smile such as one sees on a child's face when it is dreaming.

"That was the beginning, Excellenz. Her face haunted me that night and I could not sleep. I made inquiries the next morning and sought her out. We walked through the hills. She did not need my hand to guide her. She knew every stone, every turn of the paths we followed. She spoke of the trees around us. She had strange names for them. And she spoke of the flowers that were to come soon in these woods. I forgot that she was blind. I came again the next day—and the next. Her purity, her sweetness delighted me. But there was something else—a sense of disquiet. It had come to me first from the stars. I had heard a warning out of the dark mists in which the voices of the dead are hidden.

"But now more than before I felt it behind the child's smile of her lips. When her hands touched mine for the first time she shuddered and grew pale. I knew then that she was aware of her destiny. The stars had told me she would not live long and that agony and terror waited for her on the short journey.

"She was innocent, untouched as yet by life. But it is unnecessary to know the ways of the world to

know how one's heart will break. Here, hidden away, she awaited her fate without too much knowledge or too much dread. Yet her soul knew it completely. Her hand, when it sought mine in the silent shadowed woods, sought the hands of a protector. In my supernatural talent, she fancied, lay a hope of escape. I understood this as I looked at her.

"We remained for two weeks in this village. When we left Anna came with me as my wife. More than her beauty and her gentleness, the sense of her ominous future had made the thought of leaving her impossible. Thus, in seeking to save her, I fulfilled the terrible message of the stars. For it was I—Sarastro—who was the instrument fate had selected for her ruin.

"She was happy. We rode together in the gilded wagon. Her pure, trusting face was always beside me. So that she might never be lonely I instructed her in a few of the elements of magic. In a little time she was able to take her place on the platform outside my tent. Dressed in the colorful robe I bought for her she sat blindfolded—for who would believe so perfect, so beautiful a creature was without sight?—and guessed numbers, told fortunes. Everything delighted her. Everything made her smile. She was happy.

"But I was not. From the moment that I embraced her as my wife I was haunted. How can I tell you of this dread, the continual dread of knowing something, of waiting for something that one knows, of waiting for life to despoil one?

"I tried to learn more. I sought for some clue that would enable me to anticipate the thing that menaced us and so, perhaps, overcome it. But my magic could tell me nothing more. It only repeated for me the words of dread, of horror.

"Then I knew one night as I stood in the black box outside my tent that I needed no further word from the mists of prophecy. It was there. It had come. He stood among the peasants before our tent —a graceful figure, smiling, leaning on his cane. A man of the world amusingly out of place in this far-away little village. I looked at him through the holes in my box. As I looked a glow of fear came to my heart.

"He had turned his face and I saw his remarkable eyes lighted by the flare of our torches. They were round, colorless eyes. They were proud and smiling and yet lifeless. But you have seen them. You have thought this too, yes? Panini's eyes. I do not need to tell you more of them.

"I watched him and felt afraid. He was studying Anna. Never once did he stop looking at her. When we started to enter the tent for the performance he disappeared. I said nothing to Anna. What was there to say? That a man had looked at her. She would understand too much.

"I was waiting for him the next night. Yes, eagerly. You know the eagerness, Excellenz, with which one waits for all certainties whether they are bright or dreadful. He came back. He stood once

more leaning on his cane, graceful, smiling and sinister. His eyes were on her face.

"In the wagon that night she spoke to me.

" 'There is a man looking at me,' she said, as we lay side by side. Her hand crept into mine. There was nothing more to say. The same thing was in our minds.

"On the third night I decided to act. My temper was quick and fiery. I came up to him as he stood watching Anna. He followed me as if my enraged demand to speak to him were a gracious request. Ah, how subtle he was, how graceful! But that is the way of those whose souls are fashioned in Hell.

"On the outskirts of the crowd I seized his arm and demanded to know what he meant by coming every night and staring at my wife. He removed my hand as if it were a child's. I can tell you there was something terrifying in his strength as I felt it for the first time. For I knew . . . but that comes later. He looked at me with his cold lifeless eyes and he spoke softly and apologized for having given offense. He explained that he was a student of the occult traveling about the world in search of knowledge. He praised Anna as a woman of remarkable psychic powers. He said he had hoped to be able to induce her to join him as an assistant, for he was planning soon to go on the stage. But now that he knew she was my wife . . . He shrugged his shoulders and apologized again for his seeming forwardness. Then he looked at me with a curious smile and said softly, 'She is blind, is she not?' In this

moment as he smiled, I understood that he knew. Like myself, he had seen the ominous, the dreadful shadow around her.

"Yet I could do nothing. Despite my travels I was a rustic, young, hot-blooded, untutored in the ways of society. I had no words with which to resist his charm. Yes, even at that moment when I most understood him I found myself listening with interest to his talk—pleased, disarmed, moved somehow by the loneliness that underlay his eager, friendly manner. I recognized him as a genius. And he walked back to our tent with me, talking already as if I were his dearest friend.

"It was thus Panini entered our lives. Little by little, during the days that followed, he attached himself to us. He confessed simply that he had nothing to do, that he had no friends, no kin. He said he had been wandering alone over Europe since he was a boy. And he talked. Ah, his talk! We listened, Anna and I, to his tales. Yes, he had been everywhere, seen everything. He brought the world into our gilded wagon. He wooed us both as a lonely, brilliant man wooes the friendship of those he likes.

"In his presence I always felt elated and flattered. But when he left and I was alone again with Anna a disquiet came. I waited darkly for her first words. You know the dangerous words a woman speaks when she finds herself interested in a man. But they did not come. Instead she would take my hands, press them to her cheeks and whisper, 'I do

not like him, Sari. I do not like the way he looks at me. I feel something strange in him.'

"Then how eager I was to defend him, to remind her of his gay talk and of how he had made us laugh and feel happy. Thus does a man move in the grip of his destiny, thus do we dig with our own hands the appointed grave for our happiness. I was a fool, yes. But I was to be even a greater fool.

"For the time came when Anna took my hands one night and told me that our friend had made love to her. My heart grew black. I listened as she spoke for some telltale note in her voice. But, no. Anna's soul was as transparent, as pure as a child's. She clung to me as she had clung that first time in her native woods. And she repeated her fear of him. She told me he had come to her while she was alone, had taken her hand gently in his and asked her if she loved me and how deeply she loved me. Then he asked her if she loved me more than happiness or life. She had withdrawn her hand and answered only as a pure and noble soul can answer such questions. She had said, 'I cannot talk of love to you, even of my love for my husband. Please leave me.' And he had gone, pausing to ask her in the doorway to forgive him and to say that he understood now.

"It was late at night as she told me these things. And when she had finished and I was holding her in my arms there was a knock on the door. I opened it. It was Panini standing on the steps of our wagon. He held a heap of wild flowers in his arms.

"He entered without any word and laid the flowers on our table and I knew that he had picked them in the woods beyond the village. Then he spoke. 'She has told you,' he said, and as I continued to stare at him blackly, he went on, 'it was not that I desired to hurt her, my friend. I asked only if she were happy. Because she has grown dear to me. She is the first woman to whom my heart has turned. And I asked, because for a moment I grew weak. I knocked at a forbidden door as a lonely beggar might knock timidly and foolishly at the door of a great house within which he had caught a glimpse of feasting. Forget my weakness. Let me remain your friend. I am heartbroken to think I have brought a moment of unhappiness or alarm to either of you . . .'

"I remember more of his words. But what are words compared to the emotion that kindles them? And I will perhaps seem like a greater fool than I was when I tell you that tears filled my eyes and that I seized his hand. For I had never before heard so deep, so melancholy a voice as his. A voice so resigned, so caressing. I poured wine for the three of us. We drank—Panini and I. But Anna did not touch her glass. She did not speak once during his visit. When he left she sat motionless for a long time. I came to her and she raised her gentle, brooding face, and her words, uttered softly, brought the dread back into my heart.

"'I'm afraid of him,' she murmured. 'I'm afraid, Sari.'

"This was in the third month of our friendship. We were in Bavaria. Panini had come with us to Baumburg. Our carnival had planned to remain here for several weeks and Anna and I had moved into a pension. And gradually we saw less and less of Panini. He came occasionally to talk and sometimes the three of us took walks. But I began to feel it was my companionship he desired, not Anna's. He had undertaken to initiate me into the mysteries of magic and we spent long hours together—without Anna. He was learned. He knew things that are not known by many men. I was again flattered, lured, disarmed. Under his care my mind was expanding, my powers developing.

"Then one day I was sitting in my tent preparing for the afternoon performance when a curious sense overcame me. I felt a pressure on my heart as if a hand were closing around it. It was a warning. When one is close to the secrets of life and death one understands its voice, its inner voice.

"I left the tent quickly and hurried to the pension. Anna had remained behind as she frequently did in the afternoon. I tried to rid myself of the oppression as I approached our home. It would not do to frighten Anna. Yet I found myself running toward the door. I paused, waited till I had recovered my breath and then, smiling, opened the door quietly. I saw Panini standing with his arms around her, her face raised to his lips.

"Speechless, powerless, I looked at them. I heard her voice murmuring words of love. Her arms

moved around his neck and she kissed him. My head grew black. In another instant I would have fallen as one falls under a heavy blow. Yes, death seemed to enter me. Then I heard his voice. He spoke her name. He caressed her with words. At their sound a horror seized me. It was my voice. It was Sarastro talking. It was a voice that seemed to come from my own throat. A horrible, familiar voice. And I understood what had happened.

"I sprang forward shouting his name . . . Panini! He turned and faced me. He pointed his finger at me as if he were an image in a mirror. 'Panini,' he echoed.

"I heard Anna scream. But murder was in my heart. I fought with this monster. I flew at him with a knife. We struggled across the room and he answered my cries with cries that echoed each note, each inflection of my voice. I saw him through my rage. His face was contorted like my own. His every feature had changed. He was Sarastro. There were two Sarastros screaming together, tumbling over each other.

"Then he held me in hands that were like steel fetters. Powerless I lay, mad with rage and terror, under him. I could not move or cry out. His hand was on my throat. I lay gasping and crazed, and it was Sarastro who was holding me. Then this horrible and familiar figure changed. It became Panini. It was Panini who spoke. The breath was leaving my body. I was strangling, dying, yet I could hear him—'Sarastro. God! You are killing me. Sari—

Sari. Have mercy. I am dying!' His voice was faint. I felt in this moment the agonies of a hundred deaths, for as my eyes grew dark I saw with horror the thing he had in his mind. He was pretending it was I who was killing him. And thus he would kill me and go to her as Sarastro. It would be Panini who was buried. It would be Sarastro who remained.

"For a moment I caught a glimpse of his cold, lifeless eyes burning now over my face as he enacted his false death-groaning, pleading for mercy. And a strength drawn from the soul filled my lungs. I cried out the name Anna—once, twice, knowing that by this she would understand it was I—I who was dying. And darkness seized me.

"An hour had passed when I opened my eyes. My head was splitting. My throat was stiffened. I raised myself and looked. He was gone. I saw her. She was standing in a corner of the room, crouched against the wall, her hand against her teeth and staring—staring into the terrible dark around her.

" 'It is I,' I whispered, 'Anna!'

"She shrank from my voice. I dragged myself to her feet, calling her name, sobbing, pleading. But when I touched her she sank to the floor.

"It had come—the agonies and terror foretold by the stars. I lifted her to the bed. She recovered her senses, but the touch of my hand was enough to make her scream. I sat beside her through the night. I talked quietly of the little things that had been between us, of secrets only a husband may share

with a woman. I recalled myself to her as one who has been away for years might struggle vainly to prove who he was. She lay silent, her face drawn with terror and listened. Finally at dawn she whispered my name.

"This was the beginning. Panini had disappeared. I had frustrated his diabolical plan with my last cry. With his evil happiness a moment away he had released me and fled. But I kept this part of the horror a secret from her.

"We laid our plans. As soon as she was able to walk we abandoned the carnival and left Baumburg. We went to Munich. We were inseparable. She could not bear to have me away even for a moment. The darkness in which she had found peace and love had become filled with terror for her. I understood everything in her soul. Yes, even the trembling that would seize her sometimes when I took her hand.

"It would be folly to engage an attendant, a third one to watch, to guard. It was I alone he could not deceive. To everyone else he could become Sarastro. Even to her whose senses had learned every breath, every inflection of the man she loved, he had been Sarastro.

"Yes, we made our plans. We invented codes of greeting and secret hand-clasps and intimate caresses by which she might know me. Ah, how curious and terrible were these first months! With what foolish ruses, desperate childish ruses, we struggled to evade the terror that had closed around us! She was brave. She grew to smile again. The months

passed. She whispered to me now as we lay together that her spirit was recovered. She was not afraid any more, she said. The thing she had feared had come and had passed. It was ended now. We were free.

"I agreed with her. I feigned exuberance, carelessness. You understand how it was. It was her soul I must cure of its dread, for in this dread alone she would go mad. When she insisted I return to work I went. I begged her to accompany me so that we might be together while we performed. But she answered strangely that she no longer felt the power in her to perform. Something had passed from her. And I understood this, too. But I would not let her see. It would not do to alarm her. I went alone. I pretended I was without fear. But it was a lie. I was still waiting . . .

"I thought first of flying to another part of the world. But one does not escape terror by running. He would be there—wherever I was. I knew this, because it was given to me to know my fate. I remembered his genius. He had been made in Hell. He was a shadow from which I could not hope to hide. So we remained in Munich. I secured employment in a cabaret. Eight months passed. The dread, although it never left me, grew vaguer. And our life had become again almost like a honeymoon. Almost, I say, for there were moments in which I caught a glimpse of Anna's inner soul. I would wake at night to find her fingers tracing the contours of my face and body. I would lie motionless listen-

ing to her moan out of the nightmare whose nature I knew only too well. In the morning she would waken, tired and nervous. On such days I pretended to be ill and remained at her side. We said nothing, but we knew the shadow in each other's mind.

"These occasions, however, grew rarer. Ah, this fool's peace in which we struggled to live, this empty and ominous security we built around our love. Yes, for he was waiting. This monster, this fiend was hovering near us and I had only to close my eyes to feel his shadow.

"I entered the cabaret where I performed one evening, feeling unusually disturbed. It was winter. The cold had numbed me during my walk to the place. I was removing my overcoat in the dressing room and it came again as I had known it would. The warning . . . the hand closing over my heart. Without a word to anyone I left the place. In the street I felt choked, dizzy. I hailed a carriage with difficulty and drove to within a block of our home. And during this ride I kept muttering to myself that my terror was only a folly of the nerves.

"I entered our cottage by a back door quietly like a thief. And I stood listening. The room was in darkness but in the room beyond a light burned. 'She has gone to bed early,' I thought, and then, through the half-opened door of her bedroom I heard her voice. She was talking softly, happily. She was saying, 'My darling, you are ill again. We will go to sleep and in the morning you will feel better.' And a voice answered her caressingly, ador-

ingly. My own voice it was as before but tender and gentle . . .

"One does not reason in the midst of nightmare. Yet terror can wake the mind to a clairvoyance, an understanding beyond thought. I stood motionless, silent, listening. The light was turned out. I heard her laugh like a child in the dark, and this sound killed me. Yes, one is dead forever when happiness is torn from the heart. I slipped from the house like a thief. I walked in the cold streets. My thought returned. I had acted out of one clear impulse. Through the terror and agony of those moments when I heard him take her in his arms there had remained the certainty that above everything else I must save Her.

"Now I knew I had acted wisely. Had I rushed into the room, had I made a noise—she would have died. She would have known in that moment as I knew listening to him that he had been there before. That he had crept through our defenses as a shadow creeps. That despite our plans, despite everything he had stolen into her soul.

"He lay beside her now embracing her, wooing her, and she with her arms holding him. I thought of this thing as I walked. And I thought again that I had only to rush back, to speak her name. Yes, and destroy her. No, I kept on moving in the cold night. I had slunk away in order to save her. And as I walked I began to understand him. Yes, we were dealing with a monster. He would manage to leave her before I was due to return from the

cabaret. And if I sensed something wrong he would rely on my love for her to keep this sense a secret. He knew me well, well enough to take my place in her arms, well enough to take my place in her soul and to reason with my own thoughts. He understood I would allow my heart to be eaten away with grief and I would not make a sign lest I destroy her whom I loved more than myself. It was I who must be careful, not he. Yes, he knew me. He gambled on me.

"I returned. I undressed as he had directed I should undress, quietly. She lay with her lips parted and the faint odor of a drug was on her breath. This I understood, too, and was grateful—grateful to him. I stretched myself beside her, closed my eyes and waited. She awoke in the morning and I felt her hands caress me solicitously. She asked if I felt better and when I turned to her she started back in alarm. But I saw, thank God, it was only my cold fingers on her hand that had frightened her. I held my breath, however, waiting as one waits for death. I was ill, she cried. She must send for a doctor. Her lips covered my face with kisses and I choked back the tears. I strangled the agony in my heart. I said nothing. I pretended to be weary and I distracted her attention by continuous and querulous demands. She nursed me through the day.

"And thus it began again. My illness lasted for two weeks. I thought during these days that I would die. But I realized I must recover. She

would begin to fear that there was something wrong. I left the bed finally. I postponed returning to the cabaret. But this, too, had to be done. I decided, however, to leave Munich. I explained to her that the climate was better in Berlin. We went to Berlin.

"What followed is hard to tell you, Excellenz. Terror leaves no memory. Yes, I no longer lived. There was only one thing in my mind. Perhaps it drove me mad. It has seemed to me always that all this time in Berlin I was able to eat, work, even sleep, only because of my desire to save her. This desire was greater than myself.

"I had determined to kill him the first moment I saw him—alone. I knew he was near us. He had tasted of the fruit of heaven and he would not go away now. I must be careful. Then I began to think he would kill me as he had at first intended and that he would go on living with her as Sarastro. She would never know I was dead. She would continue to love me in his arms, to press her kisses upon my murderer until . . . This was the thought that contained in it the fullest measure of horror. The thought of that moment when she saw him and not me . . .

"With this in view I wrote a long letter, sealed it and deposited it with a lawyer with instructions that he open it if I failed to communicate with him a single day and act immediately on the information it contained. For the rest I managed, God knows how, to spare her. The months passed and she felt no moment of dread. This was my reward. I asked

questions, vague, subtle, disarming questions, and waited for her answers as one waits for a reprieve or a doom. Gradually I noticed that she spoke of things that were strange to me. She would continue his conversations—with me. She would speak of endearments I had never bestowed, of foolish, tender things I had never uttered.

"Do you understand the grief of these months, Excellenz? Yes, it is fortunate I cannot remember it. I can remember only prowling the streets like a madman, crawling into corners to weep, waking at night with my agony echoing through dreams of horror. I was like a thing in a trap while he came and went stealing her love, stealing my soul from under my eyes. But it was I, not he, who was afraid. It was I who held her life in my hands.

"I will pass over these months. What use is there now to remember them? They came to an end. I returned home one night after my performance. I was no longer so careful about my own comings and goings. I trusted him, do you understand—that out of his evil he would spare her as I spared her out of love. But when I entered the bedroom this time, when I opened the door of her bedroom this night, I knew he had blundered. She was alone.

"At the sound of my voice she turned. She stood facing me for a moment. Then she screamed. It is this scream I remember, it is with this voice she comes back to me. This cry of horror is my memory of Anna. She seized her face with her hands as if she were tearing something—yes, the darkness.

As I rushed to her she fell. She did not speak again. In the morning she died."

. . . . . .

Sarastro left the loft early the next morning after pinning a note on the pillow of the sleeping poet. He wrote that he had to gather more of his belongings and would be back before noon.

At five o'clock Hippolyt's patience was exhausted. At six a messenger arrived with a small bundle. It contained $250 in bills and a second note from the pen of Sarastro. Hippolyt read,

"To his Excellenz Count Hippolyt Bruga:

Be kind enough to keep my money for me. I am in the hands of police. Beware of Panini.

"Your friend,

"Sarastro."

"He is mad," Hippolyt reflected, "and the story he told me is probably a lie. However, it is none of my business."

Selecting the least rusty of the razor-blades stacked in a corner of the sink, Hippolyt fell to shaving.

Sarastro, on leaving the poet's loft, had hurried to Madam Williger's, where, for eight days, with the assistance of Dr. Potiemkin and Professor Noga, he had been engaged in an impressive but futile study of the body of Panini. Having satisfied themselves after the third day that the remains of the magician were a reality and not an illusion the three illuminati had made several efforts to restore the corpse to its

rifled grave. The watchfulness of the authorities had, however, frustrated them. Unable to return the body they had decided to secrete it for the time in a less suspicious dwelling than Madam Williger's. The commodious loft which accident had revealed to him as the home of the aristocrat, Count Bruga, had presented itself to Sarastro as an ideal place for the further secreting of the body. He had entered Madam Williger's with the intention of transferring the coffin and its contents immediately to the new quarters. His intention, however, was again frustrated. The police, headed by Lieutenant McTavish, who, after a frantic search, had tracked the missing corpse to its hiding place, were waiting for him.

XVII

The Psychopathic Laboratory was an institution newly created by the municipality for the purpose of enlisting science in its struggle against crime. Criminals suspected of psychopathic taints were daily examined by the erudite chiefs of the laboratory and scientifically catalogued as to complexes, compulsions, and obsessions.

In this manner criminals considered the victims of curable neuroses were separated from the more hopeless cases and instead of being committed to jails were despatched to a scientifically-operated farm

colony. Here, under the proper treatment, they were slowly deprived of their complexes, compulsions and obsessions, and restored to society.

Dr. Herman Sitzmeyer, in charge of the Laboratory, was a man remarkably fitted, despite his appearance, for the task. He was an undersized, bald-headed Jew, with a pallid face expressionless as an egg. His immobile features, his thyroidic eyes bulging like a frog's behind heavy glasses, his bloodless-seeming lips and hands and his peculiarly corpse-like ears contributed an ineffectual and anæmic aspect to the man. He was, however, the inventor of three paranoia tests regarded by his colleagues as revolutionary and his researches in the field of psychiatry were considered among the most vital of the day.

However, his ineffectual appearance did not extend to his manner. In repose he seemed indeed a nonentity and like so many of Israel's master minds might have been easily mistaken for a sickly little tailor under a cloud of bankruptcy. In action, however, this absurd and lifeless looking creature became inexplicably a powerful, a discomforting, a devastating intellect. He was detached and logical, precise and invulnerable. His words were scalpels, his eyes were curettes. Hysterics grew calm in his presence as with the single thrust of a phrase he uncovered a neurosis, a phobia, a compulsion. At such moments he seemed indeed like the Jesuit of legend—a cold, sinister automaton who stretched his victims on the rack of science and surprised out of them the innermost secrets of their lives.

Lieutenant McTavish had decided upon the Psychopathic Laboratory. Regardless of the protests of the Winterbottom lawyer, he knew he was entitled by law to a profound and thorough examination of his prisoner such as only the Laboratory could accomplish. Moreover McTavish had become convinced, after three weeks of daily intercourse with the man, that Winterbottom was insane. The fact that the prisoner had hysterically forbidden his own lawyer to plead insanity as a defense had, indeed, aroused certain scruples in McTavish's sensitive soul. He disliked, he assured himself, sending an insane man to the electric chair.

There was also a more involved impulse underlying the Lieutenant's decision. In his present mental state McTavish would have preferred immeasurably to have Winterbottom declared mad by competent authorities than to have him convicted of murder. A finding of insanity would have pleased and comforted the embittered detective more than a dozen executions of the creature. For McTavish had become personally involved in Winterbottom's outrageous denials of guilt. His own casual, philosophical nature had collapsed under these denials with the result that Winterbottom had ceased to be a criminal in his eyes. Winterbottom had become something infinitely worse and infinitely more insufferable. He had become an unreasonable vis-à-vis.

The preliminaries of Winterbottom's examination in the Laboratory, conducted by a bovine underling,

delighted McTavish. Winterbottom, trembling, wasted but silent, permitted himself to be stripped of his clothes. His measurements were carefully taken. He was weighed. Reflex tests were made. During the more intimate phases of the examination he closed his eyes and broke his silence. Turning to McTavish he cried,

"You shall pay for these indignities."

McTavish sneered. The quivering, frantic wretch only excited his cruelty. For in the quest of truth or its preservation cruelty is our most solacing ally.

Dr. Sitzmeyer was waiting behind his flat-topped desk. He had concluded his study of the police evidence and carefully digested the innumerable stenographic reports of the defendant's ravings.

"Have you filled out the card?" he inquired crisply, as Winterbottom sat down opposite him.

"No," said Winterbottom.

A rather peculiar change had overcome him. Although he had raged for a week against the indignity of an examination into his sanity, a hope filled him. He was in the presence of Science. He would have preferred God. But in this moment of renewed hope, God appeared to him in retrospect as almost too mystic and capricious a Person. He administered Heaven no doubt with incomparable justice. But His intercession in the affairs of living men seemed strangely inconsequent. He allowed the innocent to suffer, the pure to be maligned, the pious to be trampled upon. All this was, perhaps, part of a Divine scheme which Winterbottom him-

self had not so long ago understood and approved of.

For the moment, however, the despairing little professor felt that Science, if less omnipotent, was still more definite than God. God, pursuing a divine plan too vast for human comprehension, had permitted outrages and violences to be heaped upon one of His staunchest admirers. And Winterbottom felt himself now before a Judgment Bar less cosmic but more concentrated. Science, no less than God, would be able to look into his soul and find it unsullied, would be able to uncover the purity, the nobility and innocence of his nature. God knew he was guiltless, but God apparently conversed only with Angels. Science conversed with men. Unconscious of his insidious fall from grace Winterbottom looked eagerly at Dr. Sitzmeyer.

"May I make a statement?" he inquired, his voice shaking.

"No," said Dr. Sitzmeyer, "fill out this card."

Winterbottom nodded excitedly. By the tone of the man he recognized a colleague—a man of learning—a cold, methodical man. He seized the card and inscribed on it according to its directions, his name, age, occupation, birthplace, the cause of his parents' deaths, his two most important illnesses, the date of his marriage. After the line reading, "Have you ever been arrested before? If so, on what charges?" he wrote with trembling fingers, "No. Never. None, of course." This concluded, he

handed the document over the desk, his drawn face flushed with hope.

Dr. Sitzmeyer studied the chirography calmly and then turned to McTavish.

"Has he made any requests of you for drugs of any kind?" he inquired.

"No," said McTavish reluctantly.

"Very odd," Dr. Sitzmeyer sniffed, still studying the handwriting. "I take it, however, he has had visitors?"

To this McTavish assented.

"His wife, no doubt," pursued the scientist, "or someone else well acquainted with his habits?"

Winterbottom fidgeted and opened his mouth.

"I have always been a God-fearing Christian citizen," he spoke, "and my habits . . ."

The bulging eyes of Dr. Sitzmeyer confused him and he halted.

"Go on," the scientist ordered sternly.

"And I am willing to submit to any test, any scientific test whatsoever," faltered Winterbottom, "to prove my innocence."

"I am not interested in your guilt or innocence," Dr. Sitzmeyer interrupted, "that is for the court to determine."

He produced a ruled folder from a drawer.

"Now, Mr. Winterbottom," he went on crisply, "if you will please fill this out we will be able to get down to the examination proper."

As he spoke the bovine assistant entered the room carrying a freshly-made chart of the subject's

physical condition. Winterbottom, with an effort, suppressed a rush of words. He picked up the folder handed him, stared at its questions and grew red. As he concluded the last question his eyes bulged and his overwrought nerves gave way. Hardly realizing what he was doing, he crumpled the document indignantly in his hand, and speechless, his eyes blazing behind their glasses, he stared at the scientist. Dr. Sitzmeyer was calmly studying the second hand of his watch.

"I have been submitted to every species of insult this ruffian has been able to devise," Winterbottom trembled miserably as he spoke, his finger shaking at McTavish, "but this—this!" He waved the crumpled folder in the air.

"You refuse to answer those questions?" Dr. Sitzmeyer was calm.

"They concern matters sacred between me and my wife," Winterbottom sputtered. "No gentleman, no man with the slightest sense of decency would lower himself to reply to such inquiries, sir."

"You prefer to keep your sex-life a secret?" Dr. Sitzmeyer inquired with a slight sneer.

"Yes!" poor Winterbottom cried.

"Why?" Dr. Sitzmeyer pursued. "What is your reason?"

"My reason—my reason!" Winterbottom raised his shaking but determined finger, "is that I am a decent and honorable man who holds sacred the—the . . ."

"The what?" the scientist prompted irritably.

"Love," shouted Winterbottom. "The ties of love . . ."

"Verbigeration," Dr. Sitzmeyer stroked his cheek as was his habit whenever a diagnosis escaped him, "very interesting. Have you ever been addicted to liquor?"

The incisive voice of his questioner distracted Winterbottom from his original declaration of virtue.

"No," he answered with violence. "They have sought to make me out a murderer, a man wallowing in depravity. They have hounded me, sir, attacked my honesty." Winterbottom broke off. Tears had filled his throat and eyes.

"Hm," Dr. Sitzmeyer stared at him, "delusions of persecution . . ."

"Yes," Winterbottom's hand clutched the desk as the single word drifted through his despair-clouded mind, "persecution such as no man I know has ever been submitted to . . ."

"Who are your enemies?" interrupted Dr. Sitzmeyer calmly.

"You!" Winterbottom sprang to his feet, livid and quivering, "All of you. I come here expecting to find a friend. Someone," he went on wildly, "not in the pay of these devils . . ."

The cold, bulging eyes of the scientist remained expressionless under the tirade.

"And I find," Winterbottom cried, "another persecutor, another . . ."

"Sit down." Dr. Sitzmeyer spoke coolly. "No

one is going to harm you. Sit down and look out of the window for a moment."

Turning to McTavish, he added, "Are these his usual responses?"

"Everything you ask him is an insult," McTavish spoke from his chair. "He acts as if he were God."

"Indeed," the Doctor pursed his lips. He eyed Winterbottom with heightened interest and inquired in a soothing voice, "are you religious?"

"Yes," Winterbottom replied wildly, his distracted senses no longer attentive to the meaning of words. "I have kept my faith through this ordeal. I have been sustained by the knowledge that God will not permit such an injustice, that He will come to my aid . . ."

"What will He do?" Dr. Sitzmeyer prompted insidiously, as the subject's voice struggled for a moment against a burst of tears.

"He will scatter my enemies," the hapless Winterbottom shouted, "every one of them . . . you—him . . ."

"Have you ever conversed with God?" the scientist demanded quietly.

"Yes," Winterbottom banged his fist on the desk, "and I am not ashamed of it. My prayers—my prayers . . ."

But he could think of nothing to say about his prayers.

"Have you ever seen God?" Dr. Sitzmeyer interrupted, with some eagerness. Winterbottom became silent.

"Come, there is no use keeping it a secret," his interlocutor went on; "describe Him."

"Who?" the bewildered little professor looked about him. He felt dizzy.

"God," snapped Dr. Sitzmeyer, "what is He like, what does He say . . ."

"God," answered Winterbottom, clinging to consciousness by the thread of punditism, "is a comfort and a solace which unbelievers can never understand."

"Yes," Dr. Sitzmeyer began stroking his cheek.

"You believe you are my judge," Winterbottom's voice rose, "but there is a Higher One . . . There is Someone Who watches, Who knows."

Winterbottom covered his face with his hands.

"When and under what circumstances?" Dr. Sitzmeyer insisted.

"What?" Winterbottom moaned. "What circumstances?"

"We are talking about God," the scientist was soothing, "and I would like to know when and under what circumstances He appears to you . . ."

Winterbottom steadied himself.

"I refuse to answer any more—sacrilegious questions," he spoke faintly.

Dr. Sitzmeyer permitted himself a slight smile.

"Religious psychosis," he looked almost fondly at the collapsing subject, "come now, you have nothing to fear. Your guilt or innocence does not matter to science. I want you to give me your full confidence so that I may be able to uncover the main-

springs of your trouble. I am here to cure you. Do you understand—and . . . "

The reaction that had overtaken poor Winterbottom after his moment of hope was too much for him. Society had failed him. Now science was hounding and branding him. There was left only the vast and incomprehensible plan of Divine Justice. Somewhere high among the stars and beyond the reach of worldly senses his innocence was a fact, his virtue an unassailable phenomenon. Abandoned, cast into a pit of devils, he closed his eyes, and his soul, like a thing without wings, hurled itself ludicrously toward what it considered the Infinite. He murmured, "Oh, God, oh, God," and with the deity on his lips he fell forward, life for the moment releasing him from its foul and unbearable grip.

Dr. Sitzmeyer was equal to the emergency.

"He's fainted," he remarked dryly. "We have touched the voice of his subconscious. His foreconscious unable to tolerate this violation and fearing confession withdraws itself. It is a good sign. He will recover in a few minutes and present a more tractable surface."

"Do you think he's sane?" McTavish muttered approaching the prostrate Winterbottom.

"No," the doctor replied. "A pronounced schizophrenic. But I'm not prepared as yet to classify him. I do not believe in jumping at conclusions."

"He's the God damnedest liar," broke in McTavish; "shall I get him some water?"

"It's unnecessary," said Dr. Sitzmeyer calmly

"The loss of consciousness is a purely psychological ruse."

He arose and looked down on the faintly breathing Winterbottom and went on.

"From our brief interview I am almost of the opinion that he is suffering from suppressed homosexual tendencies. You noticed his marked aversion to the discussion of sex. The word, in fact, appeared to infuriate him. Likewise any reference to his wife was unbearable to him. These are very broad symptoms. I would advise you also to watch closely and prevent him receiving any further drugs. He is a clever but unmistakable addict. Deprived of his favorite drug I am certain he will confess."

An assistant appeared.

"Take the subject into the anteroom." Dr. Sitzmeyer turned alertly. "He's reviving now. Watch him closely and report anything he says or does."

The assistant helped Winterbottom to his feet.

"I'm all right now," he murmured.

Disheveled and pale he gazed about him. Dr. Sitzmeyer narrowed his bulging eyes as the patient shuffled out of the room supported on the assistant's arm.

"A most unusual case," he turned to McTavish, "not well defined but promising. Latent homosexuality and religious psychosis go hand in hand as a rule. His amnesia combined with his hysterical stigmata, his inability to speak truthfully on any subject, reveal the Ganser syndrome. However, there is a marked persecutory delusion. We shall

be able to identify him accurately after several further interviews," Dr. Sitzmeyer concluded cheerfully; "I'll have him in as soon as his nerves are quieted."

The assistant appeared.

"The subject is having hysterics, Doctor," he explained as he entered the room.

"Due to shock and drug-cravings," Dr. Sitzmeyer nodded. "Has his wife visited him today?" he demanded of McTavish.

"No," the Lieutenant answered.

"Well," Dr. Sitzmeyer smiled, "I think we'd better give him his rations then, or else we'll get nothing out of him at all. Cocaine—a fairly good dose," he ordered his assistant. To McTavish he added:

"His gratitude will help the inquiry considerably."

XVIII

Mr. Minus, the humanitarian, folded his small, glossy-looking hands on his large stomach and managed with some effort to smile benignly upon his surroundings. He was sitting in the anteroom of the Psychopathic Laboratory awaiting examination.

It was part of Mr. Minus's technique as a humanitarian to keep in trouble. Mr. Minus periodically displayed himself on the Cross, his proud head sup-

porting a wreath of indictments just as the cruder merchants of Fifth Avenue angled for the public eye by baiting their shop-windows with silver, jewels and laces. It is no reflection on the martyrs of old to say that Mr. Minus was a salesman, and that he was never so much a salesman as when he clambered up on his newest Cross and adjusted himself into the postures of crucifixion. He always came down with his pockets full of money and the adoration of at least five more old ladies.

Mr. Minus's present situation, nevertheless, was rather annoying. Going to jail two or three times a year to await trial for symbolic violations of law and order was a routine of martyrdom which he was wont to accept stoutly and cheerfully. But to be seized as a creature suspected of lunacy and placed under the lens of science was, as he well knew, a Cross of another color. Insanity was a dangerous charge for a worker in the modern vineyard. The public, alas, was ever ready to hide its cupidity and selfishness behind the excuse that humanitarianism was a creed advocated by lunatics. Knowing this Mr. Minus looked about him almost shiftily as he smiled, and his bosom, as the Arabians say, was straightened.

His presence in the laboratory was an unforeseen dénouement. Mr. Minus had endeavored to induce the government of the United States to establish federal soup kitchens in its principal cities. His efforts to bring his plan normally to the attention of Washington officialdom proving futile, he had cheer-

fully decided upon more colorful methods. As a professional humanitarian Mr. Minus preferred the colorful. He was proud of the fact that the newspapers considered him good copy and it was his wont to remark, unconsciously stealing the words of Ivan Karamazov, that had Christ performed three more miracles he would have saved the world three hundred wars of doubt and dispute. Unable to perform miracles Mr. Minus bent his ingenuity to achieving sensations which, he argued, were a worthy and pious substitute for the furthering of the Divine Message.

He had, accordingly, written out in a fine hand upon a sheet of tissue-paper the full details of his soup-kitchen plan and exerting some slight political influence had obtained admission at the White House on one of the public visiting days during which the President of the United States may be seen, shaken hands with and said "hello" to by his admirers. Aware, however, that all business or political transactions were forbidden during these moments sacred to the democracy, Mr. Minus had planned to submit his soup-kitchen program to the President by folding it into a small wad of paper and slipping it into the Executive palm while shaking hands with him. The President feeling this foreign substance suddenly pressed into his fingers would unfold it, read from it the crying need for soup kitchens as revealed by the statistics Mr. Minus had been at such pains to assemble and no doubt call the matter to the attention of the Cabinet. At least, come what might, the

program, of which he had made a dozen copies, would be called to the attention of the Press, which Mr. Minus reasoned is the real Cabinet of the People. However, to make the incident a striking as well as lasting one in the eyes of the public, Mr. Minus had decided upon a further gesture. He would attend the reception in sackcloth and ashes.

On the appointed morning the humanitarian in company with thirty other visitors presented himself at the White House grounds. He was arrestingly dressed in a suit cut out of black burlap. He wore a battered black derby and on his head under the derby rested a large handful of ashes.

Receiving word that the President, taking advantage of the fine, though windy day, would greet them on the grounds, the visitors lined up, a half-dozen secret-service men in their midst, and waited excitedly. At length the Chief Executive, a shy and socially nervous man, appeared and began mumbling "good mornings" and "how do you dos" as the line of handshakers moved slowly past him. Mr. Minus, his program folded in his palm, approached foot by foot. A voice whispered savagely in his ear, "Take your hat off, you damn fool." But Mr. Minus turned a sweet and disarming smile upon his adviser.

A few minutes later the humanitarian faced the President. Eyeing him benevolently Mr. Minus slowly removed his hat and extended his hand.

"Peace on earth, good will to men," he announced clearly.

The words startled the two secret-service men beside him. As he spoke them, however, a vastly more alarming incident occurred, and the thirty self-conscious admirers of their President found themselves suddenly in the midst of a great deal of shouting and confusion. What had happened was that Mr. Minus had no sooner bared his head than the wind had scattered the ashes heaped on it, blowing them into the hair, eyes, nose, ears and mouth of the Chief Executive. Startled and blinded for the moment by this strange assault the President simultaneously felt a curious pressure on his palm and snatching his hand away from the ash-erupting stranger shook it wildly in the air.

"Poison!" he cried, his mouth filling with fine cinders as he opened it. He sputtered, sneezed, coughed and covering his face with one hand pointed at his assailant. Mr. Minus saw his carefully written program fluttering unnoticed to the ground as a half dozen hands seized him and whisked him away.

His subsequent explanations given in a police cell to a group of outraged questioners aroused a nation-wide laugh. The story of the sackcloth and ashes fascinated the crude, cartooning mind of the country and Mr. Minus found himself over night labeled as the Sackcloth Nut and the Washington Ash Man. Removed from the capital he was taken to New York and after some delay ushered into the anteroom of Dr. Sitzmeyer's laboratory. It had been decided that an investigation into the Ash Man's

sanity would be more dignified than a legal prosecution.

Mr. Minus was aware that a dozen newspaper men were waiting eagerly in the corridor outside, a fact which under other circumstances would have filled him with a pious content toward his sufferings.

Piety, a deep, unquestionable Christian inspiration, he meditated, would be his best defense before the alienist. He would shame this Dr. Sitzmeyer into feeling the divine urge which had animated his soul in Washington. At the moment a disheveled-looking, trembling little man was being ushered into the room. Mr. Minus, looking up, mistook the bovine assistant for Dr. Sitzmeyer.

"I'll be back in a few minutes," the assistant was confiding to his distracted charge, "and I'll have something nice for you."

"Just a moment, sir," Mr. Minus arose, his figure exuding benevolence and dignity.

"It's not your turn yet, be patient, please," the assistant smiled.

"Dr. Sitzmeyer, I am a Christian," Mr. Minus replied authoritatively. "I am, by my record which is open to you, perhaps the only Christian in America and I insist, sir . . ."

"In a few minutes," the assistant interrupted good-naturedly. "Dr. Sitzmeyer is busy just now. I am his assistant."

"Oh," said Mr. Minus frowning, and sat down.

Left alone, Winterbottom hesitated. Finally ris-

ing to his shaking legs—he had just passed through a fit of hysterics—he approached the large man.

"I beg your pardon," he spoke nervously, "but I heard what you said. And it gives me hope that . . ."

Poor Winterbottom faltered. Mr. Minus, always prepared to be a light and an inspiration, nodded without surprise.

"Because—I am a Christian, too," Winterbottom resumed meekly; "all my life I have . . ."

"Have faith, then," Mr. Minus interrupted. "If you have sinned remember that He who watches over us knows our souls and forgives us if we turn to Him again."

"I have not sinned," Winterbottom began timidly.

"Show me the man who can say that," Mr. Minus shook his head with sadness. "The flesh is weak. We are all sons of Adam."

"I have been unjustly accused of a hideous crime," Winterbottom stared through tears at his new friend. "I am innocent. If you are a Christian you will help me. You will believe me!"

"Helping the fallen," Mr. Minus replied, unable to detach himself from his oratorical habits, "has been my life-work."

"I have done nothing," Winterbottom moaned. "They have thrown me into prison, tortured me—for nothing."

He sank nervelessly into a chair. Mr. Minus eyed him sternly.

"And you are not proud?" he demanded loudly, "you are not grateful?"

Winterbottom opened his eyes.

"You don't understand," he mumbled.

"And you call yourself a Christian," Mr. Minus lifted a pudgy hand in the air. "Yes, this is the Christianity of the world."

He was on his feet now and pointing to the stricken figure in the chair before him.

"The fair-weather Christianity of the bourgeoisie," he continued, "give them food, shelter, money, ease, comfort and the admiration of their fellowman and they are full of goodness and piety. But give them a little hardship, a little trouble and what do they do? They whimper, they complain, they call to their Fifth Avenue God that they are Christians and deserve only luxury for that reason . . ."

"Your words," faltered Winterbottom, "are true. But they do not apply to me. I have been unjustly accused. I am innocent and I have suffered every kind of . . ."

"Suffering is good for you," Mr. Minus interrupted firmly. "Suffering is the acid which eats away the superfluous worldliness. . . . It's what we need. It's what you need, and so it has been given to you. You say you are innocent."

"Yes," wailed Winterbottom, grasping eagerly at the question. "They won't believe me."

"Fine, splendid," Mr. Minus lowered himself into

a chair beside his bewildered listener. "You have found your Cross. Carry it proudly."

He watched the trembling figure for a moment and then went on.

"You are weak, I see. That is because you are full of worldly pride."

"They've ruined me," Winterbottom looked about him wildly, "my home, my reputation . . ."

"What of it?" demanded Mr. Minus sternly, "If you are a Christian you know that these are baubles. Here, stand up. Smile as I do. Look—I extend you my hand. Whatever you have done I say to you only the words, 'Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men.'"

Mr. Minus extended his hand and felt a glow of divine tolerance suffuse him. Exalted, he regarded his companion with a growing irritation.

"Stand up," he commanded. But Winterbottom clung to his chair.

Mr. Minus looked at him for several moments with disgust.

"What are you charged with?" he inquired finally, resuming his own seat.

"Murder," Winterbottom answered simply.

"Oh!" the humanitarian stared. "What's your name?"

"Winterbottom," was the answer, "Oliver Winterbottom."

Mr. Minus opened his mouth, closed it and nodded his head slowly.

"I see," he said. "Well, I thought you looked familiar."

"Have you heard about it?" Winterbottom inquired dully.

"The world is full of your crime," Mr. Minus answered.

Winterbottom's hand gripped his arm.

"My crime," he moaned, "I didn't do it. I know nothing about it. It's a plot. A hideous plot. I am innocent."

"If that is true," murmured Mr. Minus, edging away from poor Winterbottom's grip, "I envy you, sir. Yes—envy you. And were you a Christian worthy of the name, you would understand me. . . ."

He was interrupted by the appearance of the assistant.

That bovine young man approached Winterbottom smilingly and raised a small paper covered with powder to his nose.

"Here you are," he announced.

Winterbottom looked up frightenedly.

"What is it?" he quavered.

"Just a little nose candy," the assistant winked at Mr. Minus.

"What do you mean, sir?" Winterbottom demanded.

"Take a sniff, a good one," the young man insisted. "It's good for what ails you."

"It's a drug," cried Winterbottom staggering to his feet.

"That's right, old timer." the young man beamed.

"How dare you!" began Winterbottom. He made an effort to dash the contents of the paper out of his tormentor's hand.

"Here, give us a little help," the assistant called. Mr. Minus strode to his side. "He's just putting it on for our benefit," he added angrily, pinning Winterbottom's arm to his side.

"A dope, er?" Mr. Minus frowned, seizing the other arm. "I thought so."

For several desperate moments poor Winterbottom struggled against the young man's efforts to force the powder into his nose. Finally almost fainting with weakness and rage he sank into a chair. Immediately the drug shot into him, its stimulus reaching his frayed nerves. He sat bolt upright and stared about him with slowly glazing eyes. The assistant who was watching him with a sudden misgiving, for the drug seemed to be developing unusual symptoms, cried out, "Look out there!" and sprang aside.

A few minutes later the anteroom was filled with a dozen men. Still on his feet, a half-smashed chair circling over his head, Winterbottom was jumping up and down, great howls pouring from his throat.

"Come on, come on, all of you," he screamed.

"Sock him behind the ear," a burly plain-clothes man called to his partner creeping along the wall.

The fight lasted a full five minutes. Impervious to blows, dashing from one end of the room as if he were a maniac, Winterbottom swung his chair, leaped with his feet, and hurled himself upon his assailants. But the first effects of the drug beginning

to subside, his violence ebbed. An instant later a resounding clout behind his ear had floored him. Bruised and bleeding and only half conscious he was carried back to his cell. Standing over him as his wounds were being dressed Lieutenant McTavish scowled.

"Lucky he didn't kill somebody else, the damned murderer," he muttered.

And that evening the newspapers carried the engrossing story of Oliver Winterbottom's break for liberty. As a result of the incident a special guard was assigned to watch the prisoner; visitors, including his wife, were denied him and a great cry raised by the public that this dangerous criminal be rushed to trial before he managed to elude the scales of Justice.

XIX

"Wifehood," announced Hippolyt Bruga to his battered admirer, who for seven hours had stubbornly refused him her favors with the explanation that she wished to retain her virtue for her marriage, "wifehood," he scowled coldly at her, " is the triumph of all that is vicious, greedy and cunning in woman."

"Nevertheless," smiled the young woman, whose name was Harriet Langweiler, and who, after wor-

shiping him from afar, for many months, had finally met her hero through the intercession of her friend, Dr. Smith, "nevertheless," she insisted, "it is nicer to think of oneself as a wife than as a casual bedfellow to some—to some literary Tomcat."

"The ambition to become a wife," Hippolyt sneered, "is the first symptom of individual decay a woman exhibits."

Miss Langweiler felt she had earned the right to discuss abstractions with the celebrated poet. She had spent seven hours in resisting his terrifying caresses, a resistance which had been chiefly physical. She was bruised, her garments a bit torn, half her hairpins gone—but inviolate. She had kept her head, refusing to surrender or yet to flee and the day had been actually more a test of her physical endurance than her honor. Her favorite poet had dragged her into vestibules, wrestled with her in taxicabs, lured her into basements and finally out of breath and temper taken her to a restaurant in answer to her plea that she was starving.

The violent attentions of which she had been the victim did not deceive Miss Langweiler. None the less they flattered her. It was lust and the finer emotions were not involved. But the young woman was hopeful. Her romanticism refused to be insulted out of her. She was short, plump and modern. Through the day's assault she had clung to a charming dream-marriage. In fact the giddy thought of becoming the wife of a great poet had steeled her muscles against his brutal overtures. She felt now

that his lower instincts having exhausted themselves, or at least having been sidetracked by her resistance, she could address the true soul of the man.

"There are different types of wives," she remarked softly. "Don't you think it's banal to generalize about women, to say that all wives are alike?"

"No," Hippolyt replied savagely. "I think exactly what I say. All wives are alike. All tell the same lies and exude the same poisons, and have for their objective the corruption and ruin of the unsuspecting fools they call their husbands."

"But all men can't be fools," Miss Langweiler smiled. "Perhaps what you say may be true of women without souls and of men with weak natures."

"I will admit," Hippolyt frowned, "that there are some men who despite marriage retain enough honesty of mind and vigor of soul to punch their wives' faces, kick them down the stairs, starve, maltreat and if necessary abandon them. But such men, you can't deny, are in the minority and to be found chiefly among the lower classes. The predominant husband is a psychological pervert, a physical coward and a social washout. And when you say you are going to save your virtue until you are married," he continued warmly, "you mean that you are going to use it as an altruistic phenomenon with which to corrupt and morally browbeat some bewildered idiot."

"But if a woman loves a man," persisted Miss Langweiler dreamily, "if she looks up to him and admires him and is awed by his genius . . ."

"Such a woman," interrupted Hippolyt, with cold logic, "would not stop to calculate the value of virtue as a matrimonial asset."

"You are being unfair," said Miss Langweiler; "admit that a woman who allows herself to be seduced by a man's lust would not be worthy of his finer love."

"By finer love you mean," replied Hippolyt, "the impulse toward marriage."

"Yes," Miss Langweiler lowered her eyes.

"In other words," Hippolyt glowered, "the difference between lust and finer love is the difference between the price of one meal and ten thousand meals. If I were to offer to buy you ten thousand meals you would consider it a proposal of marriage. But buying you one meal you consider an overture of lust."

Miss Langweiler smiled.

"I am not mercenary," she answered, "and besides I have a good job and am well able to buy all the meals I need. Really, you're quite wrong about marriage. I have known a lot of married men who were happy and grateful to their wives."

"A cripple," Hippolyt sneered, "is always grateful to his crutches."

"Do I look very much like—like crutches?" Miss Langweiler raised her eyes boldly.

"I have no desire to marry you," Hippolyt replied coldly. "Kindly do not mistake my carnal interest in your sex for a matrimonial obsession."

Miss Langweiler winced at this, grew scarlet and

managed to stammer, "I was only speaking generally."

"Nevertheless," cried Hippolyt, flushed with victory, "it is by such dishonest interpretations of men's physical desires that women manage to lure them into what they call life partnerships. Man," he continued, his face fixed in a sneer on his blushing vis-à-vis, "man enters matrimony as if it were an exclusive and ideal bawdy house and finds to his horror, if he has any wits to observe, which is seldom, that he has blundered into a vast, ethical womb wherein he is to be reshaped, relieved of his manhood, trepanned out of his honesty and otherwise transformed into one of the conjugal automatons who are the shock-troops of morality. The operation is accompanied by such shrieking and howling on the part of Delilah that he, no less than other stupid observers, begins to fancy that his wife is the victim. Dumbly he watches her pull her hair, throw fits all over the floor, rush into the bathroom to commit suicide and rush out again to weep, moan and go into convulsions. And horrified by the disturbance he wooes her out of her seeming agonies with more and more precious presents of his manhood. Stripped finally of whatever honesty and courage nature gave him he conceives her with his new husbandly vision as a noble, self-sacrificing mate. His wife, by the exercise of her wifehood, has insured herself a docile, faithful provider and what is more, the respect of her equally unscrupulous and triumphant colleagues."

"But why do you think I am like that?" Miss Langweiler demanded pertly. "I assure you I am not."

"You have assured me," Hippolyt smiled witheringly, "that you would not sell your virtue for less than the promise of ten thousand meals. If you chose to treasure your virginity as a rack upon which to torture some poor animal into a state of whimpering docility, that is your privilege. I have offered you something else—an honest and a fugitive embrace—independent of the price of pork chops."

"It's only because I'm romantic," Miss Langweiler began.

"Women are never romantic," Hippolyt interrupted angrily. "They are able to conceal their ambitions for a short while within a cloud of second-rate poetry which they call romance."

"Why should I give myself to you," Miss Langweiler demanded calmly, "only to be cast aside as soon as you have tired of me—which might be tomorrow?"

"And why should I hang on to you when I don't want you?" Hippolyt snorted.

Miss Langweiler's modernism stifled the thousand answers her womanhood brought to her tongue. Hippolyt's trampled hope bloomed at her silence. Lowering his voice he continued softly.

"How about it?"

"About what?" Miss Langweiler blushed.

"You know," replied Hippolyt irritably.

"Please," Miss Langweiler turned her eyes away. "I—I can't endure any more of your insults."

"Oh, you can't!" Hippolyt cried.

He arose and stood beside her as she struggled unaided into her coat.

"Your beauty," he muttered angrily into her ear, "is a usurer. Your lips are money lenders and your eyes dicker for the plugged nickels of matrimony. Your ambition toward wifehood is a disease which makes you repugnant to an honest man."

The last words were all but lost upon Miss Langweiler. She had reached the door. The restaurant proprietor detaining her escort for payment of the check enabled her to escape. A few minutes later Hippolyt emerged from the place. He stared up and down the darkening street for a sign of his quarry. Then cursing the institution of marriage for having deprived him of an evening of pleasure he walked bitterly home alone.

It was at this bitter moment in the life of our hero that Amelia Winterbottom, her flushed face pressed to the window of a taxicab, her lips murmuring ecstatically the name of Hippolyt Bruga, was hurrying toward her great mission. But the reappearance of Mrs. Winterbottom in our narrative merits a fresh start.

XX

With the arrest of her husband Amelia Winterbottom had experienced a shock greater than her simple mind was able to encompass. She found herself ruined, crushed, uprooted. But there are women who, overwhelmed by torrents of misfortune, seem mysteriously made of cork. Tragedy tosses them unresistingly before it. They whirl, spin and bounce almost fetchingly in its flood. And such is the porousness of their souls and the unweighted, perhaps shallow, content of their minds, that they never sink.

Amelia not only remained afloat; she seemed actually to bloom in the currents of disaster. She wept and grew beautiful. She ran hither and thither, but instead of seeming like a chicken with its head off—an aspect which women only too easily achieve—animation appeared to increase her exterior characteristics. We are all at the mercy of our glands. And poor Amelia's glands, locked from the world behind the bars of repression, caught misleading echoes of wails and sighs, embraced the far-away sobs of grief and terror for the noises of carnival and busied themselves rather pathetically with bringing roses to her cheeks and filling her eyes with seductive languors.

As a result of this incongruity—among other

things of course, her circle of friends slowly withdrew themselves from her tear-riven confidences. Gradually as they listened to her the conviction (so uncomfortable to the pious) overcame them that the gulf between virtue and sin, though it be a bottomless abyss, is no wider than a bedroom-threshold and as easy to cross. Amelia, unfortunately, possessed only upright and honorable friends. Accordingly she found the ample bosoms on which she longed to weep transformed into pillories.

Moralists are ever psychological cannibals. They prefer the devouring of their own kind. They are quicker to raise the cry of hounds at the disrobing of a Mrs. Bluestocking then at the arrest of a Messalina. The reasons for this are multiple and exhausting. Suffice for our purposes that Amelia's friends deemed her guilty who had only been accused, judged her piously, which means with fear and without mercy, and flattered their own righteousness by denunciations of her supposed sin. Her tears only served to water their malice. They noticed for the first time that she was a shapely, undulant creature and that her body, shaken with sobs, was as pliant as a hula-hula dancer's. Not a word she uttered or a gesture she made but seemed to them pregnant with sin. This attitude may be attributed to the unscrupulous megaphones through which the newspapers assail the ears of the public when they have a lecherous tale to tell. Or it may be attributed to the ears of the public in which one murmur of

scandal is sufficient to drown out a chorus of cherubim.

Left more and more to herself Amelia wandered about her home eating five or six meals a day out of loneliness and distraction and for the same reasons neglecting to comb her hair or put on her corsets. She managed thus to impress the occasional visitor, usually a newspaper reporter, with having been torn from some secret couch of love by his unexpected arrival.

To the attorneys retained to defend her husband she was never tired of reiterating her own and Oliver's innocence. She would hurry to them after reading another of the endless stories about the Winterbottoms and the murdered Panini which crowded the press. Arrived, she would weep, demand reassurances, cower in the leather chair offered her like some refugee seeking cover from the hounds. But even her attorneys were not without their suspicion of her. This suspicion was heightened when she arrived breathless at their offices one morning to inform them that she had recalled something. She had, from the beginning, insisted she had known Panini but casually and that he had visited her four or five times since her marriage. Now she recollected, to her attorney's horror, that the magician had once asked her to marry him.

"I'd forgotten all about it," she wept. And this was true. Nevertheless the two lawyers studied her curiously. They were indignant at this new difficulty introduced into the case. "I used to attend a

music school," she went on, blurting out the unedited memories of innocence, "that's how I met him. And I remember now that he . . ." She faltered and covered her face.

"That he was in love with you?" one of the lawyers prompted angrily. Amelia, instead of answering naturally and convincingly, exclaimed in a burst of weeping, "Oh, I always hated him. There was something about him . . ." She shuddered and could go no further.

The lawyer brought her a glass of cold water. The new information struck him as damning. Amelia's original protests that Panini had been a vague acquaintance had been vastly more creditable to their case. And why the devil should the woman come rushing in with news of this closer alliance? (It was already an alliance in their thought.) The thing constituted almost a confirmation of the overwhelming "love motive" evidence unearthed by the police.

"What happened when he asked you to marry him?" scowled the lawyer. Amelia opened her eyes and stared foolishly at the man.

"I laughed," she answered. "He made me so nervous. I laughed. I remember I told him never to talk to me again."

"Why didn't you tell us these things before?" the lawyer demanded. "Why did you keep this a secret?"

"It wasn't a secret," Amelia's lips trembled, "I just forgot."

And there the matter rested, leaving the two attorneys convinced that innocent or guilty there were secrets in the woman's soul which might make their case even more difficult than it already was.

Shaken, spinning, bewildered, poor Amelia kept afloat as the weeks passed. She was as yet too stricken to take to heart the dereliction of her friends. She lived on in a trance, only half aware of her comings and goings. Oliver, whom she visited daily, became like an incredible caricature of her beloved husband grimacing out of a mist. Each time she caught sight of him behind the bars of his cell her world collapsed anew. She addressed him almost in awe. He wept before her, pulled his scant hair and cried out that the world had gone mad. She could only stare open-mouthed, overcome with shame and fear, and returning to her home throw herself on the bed in a fit of hysterical tears.

Gradually, however, through these distractions her mind fought its way back to its normal processes. In the intervals of her grief she began to think. And her thoughts, curiously, seemed crowded with memories of the strange figure of Hippolyt Bruga. He had been the first herald of her nightmare. His voice shouting outside her peaceful door, his first murderous entrance—these grew vivid in retrospect. As she stared into the darkness and mystery about her, Hippolyt Bruga was the single dubious figure on which she could fasten. He leered. He obtruded. His silk hat appeared to her in her dreams. She sought out Lieutenant McTavish and asked ques-

tions about the man. She tried to confide her suspicions of him to her friends and her attorneys. The fact that he had been arrested while breaking into Panini's house to murder him—after Panini's death of course—began to contain a great meaning for her. And then he had shouted the name Amelia. He was engaged in a crazed search for someone named Amelia.

She grew secretive as her mind became active. And nourishing the provoking image of Hippolyt Bruga in her thought she became convinced that the man was the crux of the mystery. From this conviction she leaped intuitively—in the manner women pride themselves upon—to the certainty that Count Bruga was the slayer of Panini. Here she paused for several days appalled by her discovery. She was unaware how she had made it. She knew only that being made, she had been a fool not to make it before. It was obvious. Her first impulse was to rush to the police with her information. Several days passed, however, and she took no action. She grew cautious, holding her secret from her husband and absenting herself from her attorney's offices. She walked up and down in her home, her hands to her temples.

At last, she breathed, there was something to work on. She thought of starting investigations into the murderer's past, of uncovering witnesses, questioning them, increasing the evidences of his guilt. But her nature recoiled before so much difficult realism. There were other ways of bringing this scoundrel

to justice and one evening as she sat alone weeping softly in her darkened bedroom one of these magical ways revealed itself to her. Suddenly the nightmare in which she had been spinning ceased to be a nightmare. It resolved itself into a moralistic lithograph of vice and virtue, of guilt and innocence, of God causing the right to triumph. Her simple mind, unable to face the realities around her, adjusted them, outlined them into simplicities whose understanding required only a prayerful glance.

She saw herself as a woman wronged, as a loving wife ground into the mire under the heel of villainy. And Oliver, too. They lay together. Over them towered the demon of wrong-doing, chuckling and evil. And the demon was Hippolyt Bruga. This was the tableau—the colored platitude which her soul, like some heroic billposter, had with expiring breath plastered upon the walls of chaos. Beholding it she found herself abruptly on familiar ground. The world that had been snatched from under her feet a month ago was restored. It was the world of copy-book maxims and Sunday-School teachings which proclaimed that virtue must triumph, that evil must fail. Within this world she felt alive, safe and human. And within this world she could think and act. These strange things she proceeded to do.

In the dark of her bedroom she set the tableau in motion. She saw herself with the immemorial power of the Heroine. Far from being a crushed and bleeding sacrifice she had only to rise, to fasten her accusing eyes upon the villain. His heart would

quail before her innocence. She had only to point her finger in scorn and accusation—and God would finish the drama. As she pictured these things her spirit grew strong. She felt that she had been miraculously restored to reason.

Now that she was inspired action was easy and not to be deferred. She awoke the next morning elated. She dressed slowly and carefully and with each moment the sense of her power increased. There was nothing to do but to go to him calmly, openly; face him with the facts of his guilt and then as he trembled before her explain to him how she had suffered, how the only man she loved—poor Oliver—lay in prison dying of grief. Instinctively she felt that this was the right note in dealing with evil, for like all good Christians she fancied that the devil was not really bad but merely an unhappy creature with a broken heart who could be wooed from villainy by honest tears and decent mottoes. Therefore she would weep, soften him with her anguish, and when he hung his head in shame before his victim, call upon him to repent and see that justice was done. In his suffering he would be cleansed and by his sacrifice forgiven. All this was somewhat involved in her thought but that was merely because in her excitement she had no patience to straighten the words out. They were all there—the irresistible words of virtue and a woman's sorrow. And when the time came they would all emerge in proper and telling order.

Now she had only to think of the beginning—the

first step. To go and see him, that was the practical thing. Hours later she left her home. It was almost dark. The day had passed rather abruptly leaving her still fumbling with her toilette and still rehearsing giddily the dream of her triumph. But now she was in the street and with his address in her mind she walked slowly, her face fixed by an inward ecstasy. Virtue had never offered her a sweeter reward than in these moments during which, as if girt in the armor of righteousness and with the hosts of God at her back, she advanced blissfully toward the immemorial triumph over evil.

She permitted herself little worldly fancies, coddling her rejuvenated spirit with the thought of her deed's sequel. McTavish's profound apologies, the great hurrah that would acclaim her work, the return of her friends repentant and pleading for her forgiveness that they had ever doubted her; and lastly her husband's praise, his gratitude, the loving light that would fill his eyes as he looked up at her once more from the themes on his study-table. She hailed a cab and sat in it, repeating the name, Hippolyt Bruga, and hugging to her throbbing senses the tableau awaiting her. And her poor afflicted soul expanded dreamily like some platitude on its way to its coronation.

XXI

HIPPOLYT paced his attic. Six women during the week had fled in varying degrees of panic before the mating instinct which had seized him. The matrimonially obsessed Miss Langweiler, who a few minutes ago had darted out of the restaurant, had been the sixth. Walking grimly up and down his loft the week's adventures trooped at the heels of his drooping spirit like a litter of sickly and repugnant kittens.

He recalled the waitress in the Greek restaurant across the street who had slapped his face. But remembering the look of her legs, he sneered.

"They'll wait a long time," he mused vengefully, "before I ever eat in that restaurant again."

Two stenographers, whom he had accosted after following for an hour, had wheedled a dinner out of him the next evening, and then after a good-natured scuffle in the vestibule of their rooming house, had fled up the steps, inviolate.

"Gold diggers," he frowned contemptuously and was reminded of Sylvia Delano, a notorious and Rabelaisian wench. He had spied her during the height of a party on which he had intruded in quest of a reciprocal female. Miss Delano professing to be out of sorts, he had cavalierly offered to take her

for an airing in a taxicab, murmuring insidiously that the fresh air would do her headache good. Once in the cab, however, distracted by the steady signaling of the taximeter, he had been no match for the inexplicable but concentrated resistance of his companion. Overcome finally by the increasing numerals as much as by the lady's pommelings, he had ordered the driver to stop before the first cigar store, and alighting ostensibly to make a purchase he had broken successfully into a run and disappeared. Not having danced, he refused to pay the fiddler and the memory of this evening was, as he paced his floor, not entirely objectionable. Smacking his lips he dwelt caressingly on the image of his lady waiting for his return to the cab and the ensuing argument with the driver.

"Oh, boy!" he muttered gleefully, "it probably cost her two round iron dollars."

His next assault had resulted, briefly, in his being thrown out of an east side dance hall by a group of people who seemed to be relatives—among them a husband. If not for the interference, he reflected angrily . . . but the memories were tiring. Gathering his indignation he let fly at a single target—women.

"They have nothing to offer but a grave for desire," he muttered; "to Hell with them."

Falling into a chair he stared with lowered head at the mantelpiece and a smile of pain fixed his lips. His thought had turned to Amelia and a curious sensc of hurt came upon him. Under the light shed

by the name Amelia the memory of his week's adventures seemed pleasantly contemptible.

"These strumpets sense in me that I love someone else," he mused, "that my heart kneels in a faithful ecstasy before a throne hidden from them. And this angers them. 'Hell,' " he chuckled suddenly at the six indignant fugitives, 'hath no fury like a woman scorned.' "

For a space he sat warming himself in dreams of his Amelia. These dreams were windows behind which the silver and gold of fantasy and all the riches of life lay heaped. Through these windows he looked upon the fairyland which, strangely, he called home. Still hidden from him, still unattainable, he watched her shadow move through the glittering avenues of this land. His heart saddened. But the sorrow was sweet, for the realities through which he blundered became a dust without outline.

A persistent knocking on the door summoned the poet out of his dream.

"Who is it?" he called angrily. Novelty always annoyed him and the social phenomenon of being pursued for his companionship was to Hippolyt as striking a novelty as life contained. There was no reply but the knocking was repeated.

"You can't come in until I know who you are," Hippolyt cried stubbornly. The knocking ceased. A woman's voice answered nervously but airily.

"It is I, Mrs. Winterbottom."

"Mrs. Who?" Hippolyt refused to believe his ears.

"Mrs. Winterbottom," was repeated, this time in the more emphatic tones of charm and tenderness with which a woman learns to pronounce her name in moments of confusion.

There was a pause. Then flinging the door open Hippolyt bent himself in a prodigious bow.

"Enter," he announced, his arms spread in an Oriental salaam.

Mrs. Winterbottom entered with a festive sweep of fall furs, feather-laden hat, velvet costume, scented ear-lobes and a perfumed handkerchief held pathetically ready. Hippolyt regarded this vision with a hungry and bewildered eye. He stared, blinked, assumed an expression of profound and melting languor and then, overcome by his emotions, bent himself silently into a second and more protracted bow.

"You remember me?" Amelia surveyed her host courageously. God had accompanied her to the door of her drama, given her a final push and sent her gurgling into the presence of evil. This alone could have accounted for her Alice-in-Wonderland aplomb at the moment.

"Your image," Hippolyt replied, straightening, "is a garden in the desert of my days."

He closed his eyes and inhaled slowly and somewhat noisily, due to a slight catarrh, the pleasant odor of femininity stirred by her passing. Still sniffing, he followed her into the room. Startled by these measured snorts behind her Amelia turned.

"Roses," Hippolyt explained with a flutter of his eyelids, "bloom in your wake."

There flashed through Amelia's mind the memory that the devil was a honeyed and gallant gentleman. Nevertheless, the polished manners of her host relieved her. Where there were manners there was always a heart! Amelia, thrilled by this knowledge, moved fearlessly toward what seemed to her the most respectable piece of furniture in the room. It was, in truth, a torn and rickety couch, upon which no one had thought of sitting since the death of President McKinley. If she seemed, as she advanced toward it, like some queen of profane love about to ascend her throne, the fact may be laid to the fevered imagination of her host who was now done with sniffing and stood rubbing his hands as if ready for more tangible homage. For Amelia felt herself almost a sacred figure. Her obsession shone like a halo over her thoughts. Her virtue, her mission, her righteousness closed her eyes to all but her own radiance.

"I've come to see you, Count Bruga," she announced formally and lowered herself to the couch. A cloud of dust immediately enveloped her, causing her to sneeze and cover her eyes quickly with her gloved hands. Hippolyt waited magnanimously until the eruption had subsided.

"To what," he inquired, removing his eyes with difficulty from his visitor's silk stockings, "to what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

Amelia looked around and was struck by the

sinister aspect of the room. The sputtering candles, the meager and shadowy furniture spelled evil. It was exactly the sort of place in which a murderer might live and she was thankful with a passing shudder that it was a gentlemanly murderer. She raised her large, grief-laden eyes to Hippolyt.

"It is my belief that you murdered Panini, Count Bruga," she began, surprisingly enough to the ogling poet, "and I have come to ask you to confess. You know what has happened to my husband as a result of your crime and you cannot be so bad, so heartless, as to keep silent any longer."

Hippolyt, to whom reality was ever a careless and unimportant mask, nodded calmly. The nod exalted Amelia. She proceeded mercilessly to heap coals of fire upon her victim's head. Tears flowing, she spoke brokenly of her husband, of their great love, of their faith and devotion. She dwelt caressingly on Oliver's virtues, of his renown as a scholar and the respect with which all who knew him had regarded him. There had never been, she pointed out, parting the jacket of her costume with distracted hands, so upright and virtuous a man as Oliver Winterbottom. Having reached the limits of her eloquence she covered her face with her hands and permitted her tears to confirm her statements.

Hippolyt waited patiently for his guest to finish her tasteless outburst. He rolled his eyes, ground his teeth, and finally focused his attention on the heaving bosom before him. Here, at least, were sanity and loveliness.

"Your tears," he murmured, as she paused, "are the dancing slippers of desire."

But Amelia's ears were closed to all but the sanctity of her own phrases. She was launched upon the task of confounding evil, of crushing sin to earth under the weight of moral grandeurs. She resumed her task, her furs falling from her shoulders, her blouse slipping down her neck, her velvet skirt caught in a nail uncovering her knees as she wriggled ecstatically about.

Hippolyt closed his eyes and sighed. His recent experiences in attempted seduction had left him wary. A malicious and unaccountable perversity appeared to seize upon women whom he was prepared to flatter with his devotion. His pursuits had been crowned with more blows than caresses. Logic informed him, and to his grief he was always logical, that women adorned themselves to kindle the eyes of men, perfumed themselves to stir the senses of their beholders and in every way possible sought to lure the attention of the male. Kindled, stirred and lured, they received him with protestations of innocence, and this Hippolyt regarded as a part of the clumsy dishonesty of life. He was not prepared to regard women as æsthetic epigrams.

He frowned, he stared meltingly at the disheveled and voluptuous creature the Gods had capriciously deposited on his couch and, with an effort, he removed the seven-league boots in which he was used to charging to conquest. Cunning rather than agility was required. Hippolyt was not one to

understand ideas foreign to himself. Mrs. Winterbottom's virtue did not exist for him any more than his poetry might be said to have existed for Mrs. Winterbottom. The sermons with which she continued to assail him were to Hippolyt the echoes of a bourgeois world he detested. In fact, he was on the point several times of telling her as much. But a fresh vision of her charms revealed by the poor woman in her distracted posturing seduced his intellect on each occasion. He was prepared to discount her unfortunate mind—in fact, to take advantage of it.

"She has an idea," he mused dizzily, "that I can save her husband." Memories of Sardou illumined the situation. Drawing himself up he became the Baron Scarpio, smiled brutally and regretted the absence of a mustache to twirl.

Poor Amelia, observing him hesitate and noting the play of emotion her words were kindling in him, let go a flood of sobs such as would have melted a heart of stone. She tossed in her seat, stirring up clouds of dust with every movement. She extended her arms, wrung her hands, shed half her hairpins and finally, her heart bursting with exaltation, succeeded in bringing her quarry to her feet. She beheld him at her knees and considered the tableau nearing completion, which it was. But, alas, a tableau so foreign to her intention that innocence could not visualize nor virtue forfend it.

"What," the Baron Scarpio spoke insinuatingly

from his uncontested posture at her knees, "what if I admit I killed Panini? What'll you do?"

Amelia rubbed her eyes and grew dizzy.

"We will go to the police," she spoke faintly, "and tell them."

"But what if I refuse," pursued Hippolyt, "what then?"

"Oh, you won't, you won't." Amelia returned dangerously to the battle. "You can't!" This last was a thunderclap out of heaven. Evil, however, appeared to evade its coup de grâce.

"Yes, I can." Hippolyt moved closer.

A delirium seized Amelia. Victory dangled before her. It required only, in a manner, a final grab. Amelia, staring at the prize, did not know what to do. Thus does God lead His pilgrims to within sight of the promised land and then, because He is perhaps fond of a jest, slip from their sides and allow them to shift for themselves. There is, for instance, the honored example of St. Mary of Egypt. The good woman on the way to the sepulchre of her Lord found herself miraculously sustained through floods, deserts and inconceivable hardships. Uttering hallelujahs of joy and faith she pressed on in a manner that has remained the marvel of posterity and arrived at length at a broad river. Here a lone boatman plied a ferry. Perceiving the fair pilgrim and taking note of her anxiety to be across and on her way he demanded of her that payment with which women are wont to buy their tickets to Hell rather than Heaven. Sinking to her

knees St. Mary appealed first to her God to melt the purpose of this lecherous man. But from the fellow's continued overtures she quickly understood that God, as is His mysterious habit, had at this vital juncture withdrawn Himself from her holy expedition. Without further ado, she opened her arms to the boatman explaining to him that she held her desire to look upon the tomb of the Savior a holier and more unselfish thing than her virtue. For this sacrifice she was, upon her death, hailed as a saint and received into the calendar.

Amelia did not hold out her arms. For, despite the example of Mary of Egypt, it is unnecessary for a woman to resort to sin to gain her ends. Amelia merely abandoned her lithographs for the moment and became a woman. She substituted a tearful smile for moral grandeur, a volley of helpless sighs for the voice of righteousness and, closing her eyes to all but the prize dangling before her, reached for it with the scissors of Delilah.

Flushed and bewildered she considered that the slayer of Panini kneeled before her, confession trembling on his lips, and that she held in her hand the key to her poor husband's freedom. To his amazement Hippolyt found her hands on his shoulders. The eyes he beheld were swimming with emotion. Still he hesitated. But his hesitation was now one with which hunger pays homage to a feast.

She was cajoling him, aware only of the warmth which pleading in a virtuous cause always inspires in a woman. If God would not drag him into her

tableau, she would. For what woman is there who does not believe in the divinity of her hips, in the piety of her caress? If he would not yield before the spectacle of righteousness he must succumb before the vision of injured and appealing womanhood.

It is, however, a tribute to poor Amelia's innocence—in fact a last tribute—that she considered the sighs, murmurings and distracted gestures she seemed now to inspire in her victim, the struggles of an evil soul towards grace. She allowed him her hands. The dust thickened about them.

Strumpets who see their virtue as a doubtful thing know when it is threatened. The innocent, alas, with no unhappy memories to guide them must rely in extremities upon God, Who, as has been monotonously pointed out, is ever a dubious Factor in the affairs of men and women.

"For my sake, you'll confess," she murmured, clinging to a tableau becoming strangely disordered.

As for the Baron Scarpio, he vanished in a cloud of dust.

. . . . . .

Amelia leaned against the mantelpiece for support. She had been leaning in this manner for a full ten minutes and Hippolyt considered it almost time she was saying something. He was inclined to be sarcastic.

"Well," the poet broke the silence, "are you going to stand there all night?"

Amelia gasped. She allowed a number of minutes to pass. Then a thought jostled weakly through

the confusion in her head and staggered within reach of her tongue.

"At least," she murmured, "you will give yourself up to the police."

It was a sorely bedraggled phœnix rising out of the dust. But she embraced it in despair. The tableau of virtue triumphant, like some battered, woebegone prodigal, had stumbled into her vision. She clung to it.

"That was . . . the bargain," she faltered.

"Who do you think you are, La Tosca?" Hippolyt was cold. "There's your hat," he added.

Amelia leaned over mechanically and picked her hat from the floor. Mechanically she put it on her head. Lucretia in a reveler's bonnet would never have convinced a magistrate.

"I am not interested in any bargains," Hippolyt pursued loftily. "I know nothing about Panini's death and I care less what becomes of that stuffed parrot you call your husband. So you might as well go home."

This was final and unbearable destruction of her lithographs.

"You killed Panini," she rescued her voice from the debacle.

"Don't talk like a fool," Hippolyt was curt. He was beginning to feel a sincere annoyance toward the creature's obsession that he was a murderer. Amelia caught her breath in a sob.

"I am going straight to the police," she announced.

"All right. Hurry up," Hippolyt replied indifferently.

She walked across the room, leaned for a moment against the door and then, clinging to the banister, moved down the stairs like a stricken child. She tried to drag her battered and wretched tableau with her. She had purchased Oliver's freedom—at an unexpected price. The first breath of night-air blew the thing out of her head, however. She leaned against the cold stone of the building as she had a few moments before against the mantelpiece.

"Oh, my God," she repeated.

After staring at the dark and empty street for an indefinite space, she managed to hail a passing taxi. She gave her address and entered. Inside she began to weep. But her tears were vague. She recalled with a shock what had happened. The memory was still certain. But the grief it aroused was nevertheless confused. She did not know quite what to grieve over, her failure to save Oliver or the incredible disaster which had attended her efforts. At the moment she herself could not have told whether she wept over her tragedy or out of her disappointment. A more sophisticated woman with the memories of literature and the drama to choose from would have found it easy to climax her betrayal with a chapter of sobs by Balzac or a second act scene out of Sudermann. But Amelia, ignorant of art no less than of life, passed through these vital moments looking bewilderedly at the back of a chauffeur's head.

It is the reward of the pure in heart that they may

see themselves through the ennobling film of their intentions, a film behind which reality is never more than a fugitive shadow. Thus it was no more than a fugitive shadow which had shared the dust with Amelia in the Pamphula loft. She considered herself ruined, betrayed, crushed but nevertheless could not believe it. True virtue never repents. It forgets. Amelia wept softly, shuddered, tried pitifully to understand what had happened and in what way it had altered her. Her thought repeated to her that she had gone to save Oliver and had failed. The manner of her failure, however, slowly buried itself in the wastebasket moralists always reserve for accidents. Poor Oliver, she mused despairingly, she had done her best for him.

As the cab drew up before her building her tears had ceased. Her horror of what had happened remained unspoken in her mind. Her thought had reached an impasse. There being nothing to do about it poor Amelia decided to forget. She alighted from the cab in a daze, paid the chauffeur and turned toward her home.

Opening the door of her apartment, Amelia stared, trembled and uttered a scream. The rooms were lighted. This she noted first. Then her eyes encountered her husband. He was sitting in a chair, pale, smiling and regarding her.

"Oliver," she cried. "What—has happened?"

She rushed to his side.

"I am free," he answered, his voice shaking. "Truth triumphed at last. They let me go—this

evening. I'm exonerated. Where have you been?"

"Oliver," she repeated. Her happiness mollified him. She could neither speak nor cry out for moments. But as he embraced her, his hand patting her shoulder reassuringly, there flashed through Amelia's mind the thought that her sacrifice had not been in vain. The connection between the deed and its result was beyond her thought. But one does not look miracles in the face. She flung her arms wildly about the astonished Oliver. They were both saved. God had been with her in the dust.

XXII

Rufus Chittering, Sr., owned two railroads, a fleet of ocean liners, innumerable forests, coal mines, rivers, waterfalls, iron foundries and steel mills; a half dozen skyscrapers and a famous bank. He maintained a floor of offices filled with distinguished-looking men and women who did nothing but keep track of his possessions.

Once a week Mr. Chittering visited these offices and conferred with the most distinguished-looking of their occupants to learn what his possessions were doing and if he had acquired any more possessions. He was shown telegrams in code, letters intelligible and letters unintelligible, documents and lists of typewritten figures. Over these he would sit for an

hour, an undersized, stocky little man with mild eyes and an 1890 mustache. He would nod, look pleased, murmur, "That's good. That's fine. I'm glad to hear that."

Then, left alone he would sit regarding the huge Venetian table which served him for a desk, and think of all the things he might do; or rather of as many of them as occurred to him at the moment. But the doing of things had long ago lost their interest to Mr. Chittering. Being a simple and practical man he realized that his wealth was his superior.

He could only peer at it in this fashion. He was like the author of a great drama privileged beyond its applauding audience to observe it from the wings for a few moments now and then. Thus he sat in his office peering a little while at the vast and familiar performance of his wealth. An hour usually sufficed for this intrusion. After this hour he put on his derby hat, lined with satin like a child's coffin. And with it he put on a very serious expression to conceal his indifference. Thus looking as nearly a great financier as it is possible for a great financier to look he passed through the offices of his distinguished employees into the street again.

Years ago when his wife was alive Mr. Chittering had devoted a great deal of time to spending money. He had been fond of riding from one end of the world to the other buying things. But in the last fifteen years he had given this up. He now employed five learned and distinguished men to do his spending for him just as he employed thousands

upon thousands of them to do his earning for him. These five gentlemen moved like sieves of gold over the earth and made tireless and often amazing purchases in the hope of pleasing Mr. Chittering for a few minutes wtih a new color, a new design, a fresh possession.

As a result of their movements and loyalty Mr. Chittering's chateau, mansions, offices and hotel suites became crowded with tapestries, fountains, paintings, statues, bric-a-brac, rugs, books and historical treasures made of glass, gold, silver, bronze, copper, jade, iron and enamel.

From behind this Niagara of possessions Mr. Chittering peered at life with all the naïveté and simplicity of a hermit. The faces and the souls of people were more numerous and more varied than his dollars. They aroused a mild curiosity in him. Looking at them and catching faint echoes of them he wondered what life was. He read a great many books in order to find out. But the answers they offered were, like his other possessions, too easily bought to satisfy him. They left him with a pleasant hunger and this hunger he cherished eagerly. It was, after sixty-four years of fantastic acquisitiveness, his most prized possession.

When his son decided to follow the career of detective Mr. Chittering had at first been appalled —and then amused. The old gentleman had for several years come to regard his son as an ominous source of publicity. He looked forward with a naïve dread to the scandals and mésalliances which

from his knowledge of the Sunday newspaper supplements seemed the almost inevitable destiny of youthful heirs or, as they were called, scions.

But as the years passed and the sturdy Rufus II emerged unscathed from his adolescence Mr. Chittering's alarm lessened. And, after the first excitement stirred by his son's announcement of his career had subsided, he embraced the situation with considerable if secret satisfaction. As a detective Mr. Chittering felt that his son had chosen a hobby which would not only sharpen his wits, but perforce keep him out of mischief.

As a matter of fact not a month passed before Rufus Jr.'s activities became the most engrossing factor in the old gentleman's life. He had begun by exhibiting a casual interest. Then, despite his ironical sense of a Chittering playing at policeman, the thing had gone to his head. He formed the habit of slipping away from his innumerable appointments for visits at the Chittering Detective Agency. Here he would sit amused and thrilled by the strange atmosphere of what he considered was Life. The police sheets of Criminals Wanted with which Rufus Jr. had placarded the walls of his office excited the old gentleman more than the gallery of Rembrandts in his home. He considered his son's activities as a peep-hole upon that rich and unpurchasable possession for which he mildly hungered—the world of confusing faces that lay outside his orderly kingdom.

On this afternoon the old gentleman arrived in a

flurry of excitement at the Agency. He had noted the story in a newspaper that Oliver Winterbottom, for whose arrest he considered his son's genius responsible, had been released as a suspect in the Panini mystery. Mr. Chittering took the news to heart. He spent a full hour denouncing this development and upholding the theory of Winterbottom's guilt to a group of elderly financiers. These colleagues had inveigled him into having lunch with them in the hope of broaching a number of projects having to do with the hydro-electric development of industry. But Mr. Chittering, his coffee finished, excused himself in what was considered a rather childish manner and, still sputtering over the abominable stupidity of the police, seized his hat and hurried at once to the Agency.

He found Rufus Jr. surrounded by a funereal trio—Lieutenant McTavish and his subordinates, Officers Mullins and Miller. With his first glimpse of the company Mr. Chittering knew that something dreadful had happened. Sorrow and gloom sat heavily upon the four faces. Officer Mullins failed to spring to his feet and offer his chair in preference to the half-dozen unoccupied chairs in the office. Officer Miller who, confusing the great financier with overseas memories of General Pershing, invariably greeted him with a dress salute, contented himself now with a mere nod of his head. Lieutenant McTavish remarked, "How do you do," in a far-away voice. As for his son he had never seen him in such a condition since his failure three years

ago to make the varsity football squad. Not without a grateful thrill, the old gentleman felt himself in the presence of disaster.

"Well," he remarked, "I've read the newspaper story. You've let him go, have you?"

Despite his effort to speak politely there was a belligerent tone to Mr. Chittering's query. Thousands of distinguished men known to Mr. Chittering would have quaked inwardly at the sound of it. It passed here, however, unnoticed. McTavish nodded pensively and lighted his pipe.

"Good lord!" went on Mr. Chittering, "what's happened? The thing is incredible! That man Winterbottom . . ."

"Would you mind my father seeing the letter," Rufus Jr. interrupted.

"Oh, you've got a letter?" Mr. Chittering exclaimed.

"If you'll promise not to say a word," Lieutenant McTavish frowned. "Yes," he added with embittered emphasis, "we've got a letter. And we don't want the newspapers getting wind of it, either . . ."

"My word of honor," Mr. Chittering interrupted eagerly.

"Give it to him, Ed," the Lieutenant sighed.

"I can't believe that this man Winterbottom is innocent," Mr. Chittering muttered as Officer Miller fumbled among the contents of a brief-case; "I don't see how a letter can possibly alter the facts, gentlemen. The facts are . . ."

And he would have gone into an exhaustive ré-

sumé of these facts had not Officer Miller intervened with a number of typewritten pages. Adjusting his glasses, the old gentleman took them out of his hand. The company relapsed at once into a gloomy silence as Mr. Chittering, his brows acquiring a deeper and deeper furrow, applied himself to the reading. . . .

"To the gentleman of the Police who are engaged upon the mystery of my death—

"I first desire you to consider this document authentic, that is—written by me, Enrico Panini on the date indicated above—a week as you see, before I was found by the movers dead in my property-trunk in my apartment."

"Good lord!" Mr. Chittering exclaimed and looked up rather bewildered.

"Go on," McTavish mumbled. Mr. Chittering, his hands aquiver, resumed his reading. . . .

"To this end I have taken the pains of entrusting this document to my attorneys in the presence of four witnesses, with instructions that it is to remain sealed and guarded until two months after my death. The Messrs. Braith and Calhoun, in addition to their high standing as counselors, are gentlemen of discretion and honor—as are the witnesses chosen by them to substantiate their testimony. And knowing them well I have thus relied upon their words as gentlemen to hold this document, of whose contents they are unaware, secret for two months regardless of whatever excitement may be created by my death. The authenticity of this letter accepted, I may proceed.

"It is Enrico Panini, dead now for eight weeks, who addresses the members of the Police, who asks humbly that he be listened to and obeyed in a matter which, after all, pertains chiefly to himself—namely, his death.

"I would like to content myself with the mere statement that Mr. Oliver Winterbottom, who at the moment of this first reading of my words undoubtedly languishes in prison for my murder—is innocent. But this, I foresee, will not suffice. Fortunately, therefore, I can prove that Mr. Winterbottom's horrified protests of innocence, which I am sorry to have missed, are correct. I submit to you the following substantiations:

"1. If you will call on Dr. Jens Erikson, the oculist, you will be able to learn from his office-records that Oliver Winterbottom was in his office between the hours of 10 and 11 on Friday morning, July 27. Dr. Erikson has treated Mr. Winterbottom for astigmatism for three years. The patient is well known to him.

"2. The records kept by Mr. Rufus Chittering, Jr., will also reveal that he was visited by Mr. Winterbottom at his office at exactly 10 o'clock on Friday morning, July 27, and retained to 'shadow' Mrs. Winterbottom suspected of certain indiscretions.

"3. It follows, after comparing the records to be found in these offices two miles separated from each other, that Mr. Winterbottom appeared in only one of them and that an impostor was present in the other. Allow me to assure you that it was an im-

postor who engaged Mr. Chittering's services as a detective. Mr. Chittering will find a card attached to the underside of his desk upon which I have written 'Please accept my apologies and henceforth be more suspicious of a client who insists on the shades being drawn while interviewing you.' To this I have signed my name and the hour and date of my visit.

"4. The records in Mr. Chittering's office will also show that it was on Monday at 11 o'clock on July 30 that he 'picked up' Mrs. Winterbottom and shadowed her to my apartment.

"5. Inquiry at the office of Dr. Henry Worth will reveal, however, that Mrs. Winterbottom had two teeth filled on July 30 between the hours of 10:30 and 12. The appointment-book kept by Dr. Worth's competent secretary will conclusively corroborate his, my own and Madam Winterbottom's statements.

"6. It follows again that one of the Mrs. Winterbottoms in existence between the hours of 10:30 and 12 on July 30 was an impostor. Dr. Worth, who has been Madam Winterbottom's dentist for five years, will assure you that he operated during these hours upon the actual and authentic Mrs. Winterbottom.

"7. The Western Union Telegraph Company, Station 17, has in its records the fact that it delivered a telegram to Mr. Oliver Winterbottom at 4:30 A. M. on the morning of my death. The telegram was delivered by a young man named Fred Abra-

hams, living at 212 West 15th Street. It was received by Mr. Winterbottom and signed for by him within ten minutes before or after the inquisitive milkman peered into the back window of my apartment and beheld a man in a silk hat whom he no doubt later identified as your present prisoner.

"8. Investigation at the passport offices in Washington will reveal to the police that the passports found in my hotel-room bearing my own and Amelia Winterbottom's photographs are forgeries and were never issued by the authorities.

"9. At the shop at 867 Seventh Avenue, a young woman named Hazel Orman may be found who will on questioning recall, I am certain, selling a complete woman's wardrobe to a man with, I hope, an unforgettable red beard. The clothes presumed to be Madam Winterbottom's and found in her trunk on the Cunard pier are thus explained.

"10. The mechanics of my death involving my apparent murder at the hands of a strangler and the last minute signaling of my dead body from the trunk, I do not care to explain. The fact that I was, to my death, the most talented of magicians known in my day, must be taken as sufficient guarantee that I accomplished my death and all its subsequent developments—even to the finding, I hope, of the half-burned Amelia letter in my fireplace—easily and without assistance.

"11. Nor do I care or need to go into further details concerning my supposed visits to the Winterbottom home and the testimony you have no doubt

secured from the apartment-building employees concerning the comings and goings of Panini and Winterbottom on the night preceding my death—and the morning following. If the gentlemen of the police will search behind one of the chimneys on the roof of the Winterbottom apartment-building they will find a box containing paints, stencils, mirrors and other theatrical makeup materials. I have left them as a corroboration.

"In conclusion allow me to make this assurance—that Mrs. Winterbottom is a virtuous woman who has never suffered the embraces of any man other than her husband; that the letters found in my room and supposedly written by her are forgeries. On each of these letters if held to a flame for a moment will appear some words I have written in 'invisible' or lemon ink. You may be certain, gentlemen, that all evidences, alas, of her association with me are similar forgeries.

"I did not intend at first to go into the details of my motive. Yet considering it again it may be that without motive my unusual behavior may seem too irrational to be convincing.

"Here, however, I feel a confusion which my mind finds it difficult to convey coldly. It is my desire to laugh evilly, to disorder the lives of two people who have injured me by nothing more tangible perhaps than their existence. It is my desire to acquaint one of them with the quality of my laughter as she once acquainted me with the quality of hers. Yes, it is my desire to avenge myself

against the virtue of a senseless woman and the morality of an objectionable man.

"I can say no more than that my death to which I look forward becomes a jest too keen to forego. Life has surrounded me with many dark and curious things and I find, alas, that if I would laugh—I must make my own laughter. I leave nothing to the world but my apologies for my mirth.

"Enrico Panini."

XXIII

Mr. Chittering laid the letter on his son's desk, opened his mouth and then closed it again and said nothing. His eyes however regarded the melancholy McTavish with an almost childish wonder.

"Nothing could have saved Winterbottom—but that," McTavish finally muttered.

"It may be a hoax," Mr. Chittering found his voice.

"We've checked up on it," Rufus Jr. smiled sadly.

"And checked back," Officer Mullins nodded. "It's O.K."

"Good lord!" said Mr. Chittering mopping his brow with a handkerchief, "I never heard of such a thing. What a man! What a devil! Good lord!"

Mr. Chittering moistened his lips, but could think of nothing else to say.

"They all confess, don't they?" Rufus Jr. remarked nervously.

"They do and they don't," Officer Miller sighed. "You sometimes get them like this Winterbottom . . . I mean . . ." he broke off and blushed.

"Innocent," Lieutenant McTavish muttered. "They're sometimes innocent."

"They're the worst kind," Officer Mullins explained darkly. "They throw you right off the track."

"Do you think this man Panini," began Mr. Chittering staring at the Lieutenant, "do you think he was insane? To kill himself in such a manner. And for such a reason! Good lord!"

"I know a lot of people," McTavish replied, "who hold that a man doesn't commit suicide unless he's out of his mind—at the time. But I don't believe it. It's been my experience that a man doesn't mind dying—unless it's against his will."

"I don't understand," Mr. Chittering murmured.

"Nobody likes to die when they don't have to," Officer Mullins explained patiently. "I don't care how game they are."

"If you're not in a hurry," Lieutenant McTavish turned his good eye politely upon the old gentleman, "I could tell you a curious story about a man not wanting to die."

"I haven't a thing in the world to do," Mr. Chittering exclaimed eagerly. "This is most interesting. Most interesting," he repeated firmly.

"Well," McTavish went on, "we haven't got

much to do either. I can't bear to go back to the station. I think I'll resign and have it over with."

"Oh, no, no," Mr. Chittering remonstrated.

"I'm no good," McTavish muttered, "and I've always known it."

"It's just that we're all disappointed," Mr. Chittering remarked, rather blood-thirstily, "over this man Winterbottom's innocence."

"Oh, come on, tell us the story," Rufus Jr. spoke up coaxingly, "I'd like to forget about Winterbottom for a while."

"Well, it was about a man named Henry Spencer," McTavish began. "I don't suppose you've heard of the case," he looked politely at Mr. Chittering who shook his head at once and murmured that he hadn't. "Well," went on the Lieutenant, "I was on a vacation visiting my wife's folks in Wheaton, Illinois, and two days after I got there they were scheduled to hang this Spencer for the murder of a dancing teacher named Mrs. Allison Rexroat. He'd killed her with a hammer while out walking with her, then buried the hammer, removed her jewelry and the silk stockings she wore to give to another woman he was also in love with at the time, and gone back to town.

"He was arrested a short time later and after denying the crime for a few days finally confessed, took the police to where the hammer was buried and turned over the dead woman's jewelry to them. The stockings, he explained, had left town. Then

he sort of opened up and confessed to four other murders and was sentenced to be hanged.

"He was kept in the Wheaton jail and I'll never forget the date of the hanging—August 4. It was the day war was declared. August 4, 1914. We got news of the war starting over the press wires in the hanging stockade the sheriff had built back of the jail just as Spencer came walking out to get hanged.

"Well, to go back, Spencer got religion while he was waiting for the big day. A pair of itinerant evangelists took to visiting him in his cell of nights bringing an old melodion with them and the three of them—Spencer and this man and his wife—would sing hymns for hours to the accompaniment of this old melodion. Spencer's reformation was remarkable. He was an illiterate man but inspired by religion his mind developed phenomenally. He could recite dozens of psalms from memory and in perfect English. Well, he began to ask the sheriff to hurry up with the hanging, he was so anxious to get to the Heaven he'd been hearing about and singing about.

"This has nothing to do with the story but I always thought it was rather interesting. I remember calling on the sheriff one night, on the eve of the hanging. He was sitting on his front porch alongside the jail that was next door—and he had a coil of new rope in his hands. He was greasing the rope with vaseline and the melodion and the hymns were going full-blast overhead. And I remember the sheriff

saying to me as he looked up at the stars in the sky, 'There's nothing like the old songs, is there?'

"Then he ran out of vaseline and called into the house, 'Hey, Jenny, Jenny.' His daughter came out asking what he wanted and he told her to bring him her jar of cold cream to finish softening the rope with. Jenny refused saying she wouldn't have her cold cream used on that rope but after a little argument she went in and got it. And I remember the sheriff saying that children were getting spoiled nowadays principally from reading the newspapers. I never forgot that scene. Well, he finished greasing the rope and gave me a ticket for the hanging and that being what I'd come for, I went back to the wife's folks and spent the rest of the night listening to them denounce me as a cruel-hearted creature for wanting to see a man hanged.

"Well, the stockade was quite a sight the next morning. Nearly everybody of importance in the neighborhood was there. They'd kind of bungled the scaffold-building, I remember, erecting it about ten feet too high and there was considerable talk of somebody having grafted out of the lumber appropriation. Anyway, the gallows-platform was on a level with the tops of the trees that surrounded the big stockade fence. There was a flight of steps leading up to it and I remember there was a small garden of dahlias at the foot of the steps.

"Well, Spencer finally came out—in a white shirt with the collar open and sleeves rolled up, white duck trousers and tennis shoes. He stopped

as he started up the steps and picked a dahlia and borrowed a pin off the sheriff and pinned it over his shirt pocket. Then he ran up to the platform ahead of the sheriff and the hangman and the man and woman evangelists.

"He stood smiling good-naturedly down at us while they tied his hands and his ankles and while they hung the white robe on him fastening it with a draw-string around his neck. When they'd got this far he raised his head and began looking at the summer sky. The sheriff fixed the rope, pulling the knot around so it came under his ear. Then holding the white hood in his hand he asked him if he had anything to say before he died. Spencer nodded cheerfully and said, 'Yes, sir,' and the two pale-looking evangelists lost their wits and began singing all sorts of hymns out of tune behind him.

"'Yes, sir,' Spencer spoke up still smiling at the sky, 'I have this to say.' And I never forgot his words. 'I want to say, gentlemen,' he went on, 'that this is the happiest moment of my life. I haven't ever had a father or a mother. But now I am going to meet a father and a mother and they are going to take me in their arms . . .' And he kept on like that and you could see as he talked that he was looking straight through the summer sky into heaven and beholding the streets paved with gold and the angels singing and waiting for him.

"He interrupted himself several times to recite some psalms. Then he would go on about his happiness and how he had repented of his crimes and

been washed clean as the lamb and how he had been forgiven by the father and mother waiting for him and how the pearly gates had been opened for his coming. And all the while he kept talking the sheriff was too nervous or upset to interrupt him and clap the white hood over his head and everybody in the stockade began to get the fantods listening to him.

"Finally, however, he ran out of words and stood silent, looking at the sky with his eyes shining. The sheriff came out of his trance and moved forward with the hood. And just as he did a bird started singing in one of the branches on a level with the gallows-platform—only a few feet away from Spencer. And I'll never forget how this man Spencer changed as the bird notes filled the air. Yes sir, he fell out of Heaven and his eyes grew mad with fear and he let out a howl and cried, 'Just a minute . . . just a minute . . . I got something more to say. For God's sake!'

"The poor sheriff almost dropped in his tracks he was so surprised, and this Spencer looked around him and he couldn't think of anything but he began in a husky voice—stalling: 'Gentlemen . . . gentlemen . . . I want to say that . . . I want to say that I am innocent of the murder of Mrs. Allison Rexroat. I never done it. Wait a minute—for God's sake . . . It's a lie . . . Wait a minute. . . just a minute . . .'

"But the sheriff had the hood on his head and jumping back raised his hand. You could still hear

this Spencer mumbling behind the hood that hid his whole face when the trap banged down and he shot through. I couldn't figure out for a moment what had happened and kept looking at him as he spun around on the rope, the white robe blowing up like a balloon and collapsing like a balloon as he hung there. You know they don't die right away unless the neck is broken which is seldom. . . . It takes from ten to twenty minutes.

"Then as I kept watching it, I heard the bird going it again in the tree and it came to me. Spencer had heard the bird, you see, and it made him want to live. And for the sake of living another minute or two he had thrown away his Heaven with its golden streets and angel choirs. He died with a lie on his lips because the lie kept him alive a few more seconds."

Lieutenant McTavish concluded with a wry smile.

"That's the way people are," he moralized lamely.

"Yeah," Officer Mullins agreed somewhat perfunctorily, eager to be on with the narrative that was trembling in his own mind for utterance. "Now take a case like . . ."

"We might as well be sociable and have something to drink," Rufus Jr. interrupted with an inquisitive look at his parent.

"Yes, yes, by all means," Mr. Chittering agreed. His knees were quivering with excitement. He felt himself strangely small and unreal and the sensation was pleasing. He accepted a glass of cognac from his son's hand and listened vaguely to the reassur-

ance, "I got it from the house, dad, so you needn't be afraid of it." The company drank, and Rufus Jr. with the worldliness of a man who has been present at murders and executions and mysteries essayed a joke on the subject of Prohibition which Officers Mullins and Miller ignored as being rather a tactless subject for conversation. Mr. Chittering's mind, warmed by the cognac, returned to the bewildering figure of Panini and a strange thought occurred to him: Why had the man desired to avenge himself and what did he mean by laughter? Simultaneously he saw a man in a white robe standing on a platform with a rope around his neck and a bird singing to him and this was confusing, in that it answered nothing. Nevertheless it was part of life and the old gentleman felt grateful and would, had he thought of it, handed the three tale-tellers about him half his fortune to sit for an hour in their shoes and hug to his heart their possessions. But Officer Miller was demanding his attention and saying, "I can tell you a funnier one than that. Let me tell this, Jim. I ain't had a chance yet."

Mr. Chittering looked up and said, "Yes, by all means," and sank back in his chair with a peaceful sigh.

"Life," he murmured, "is curious, isn't it."

Swallowing the drink he repeated the observation as if it had gathered some weight during the interim. And by the time the company had been served the conversation had returned to Panini and Mr. Chittering was inquiring whether they could say, for a

certainty, if the magician had been insane. To this his son replied:

"Of course he was. That's what made him so cunning. Maniacs are the most cunning people there are. That's how he fooled me."

"He was cuckoo all right," Officer Mullins remarked consolingly, "he even fooled us."

"Not all of us," muttered McTavish.

"You were the most convinced that Winterbottom was guilty," Rufus Jr. recalled with some heat.

"Oh, I don't mean myself," McTavish sneered, "if there's anybody that's going to get fooled in a mystery, I'm always the first. I never solved a case in my life. I'm . . ."

"How about the Eddie Marcus case?" Officer Mullins interrupted loyally, "it was you brought Eddie to justice. He was electrocuted, too," he added winking at Mr. Chittering, "and here's the man that done it . . . Lieutenant McTavish."

"Drink her down," cried Officer Miller who considered this a toast.

"Certainly, certainly," Mr. Chittering agreed, "come on, Rufus."

And the old gentleman stood up, raised his refilled glass and remarked with quite a flourish:

"To Lieutenant McTavish, here's to your health, sir, and continued usefulness in the—in the pursuit of crime."

"I guess you mean criminals, Dad," Rufus Jr. laughed, "in the pursuit of criminals, eh?"

Mr. Chittering was overcome with mirth at his

error and returning to his chair beamed genially on the company.

"What about this Marcus case?" Rufus Jr. prompted.

"Yes, tell us about that," Mr. Chittering drew a deep breath, "what was he electrocuted for?"

"Well," said Officer Mullins, "he had a disease. I forget what they called it. But he couldn't stand up. He had to lean. And he couldn't lie down or sit up either. He had to lean all the time."

Mr. Chittering digested this information as well as he could.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured finally, "but who was this?"

"Eddie Marcus," Officer Mullins repeated, "he had a disease that made him tip."

"His equilibrium was abnormal," McTavish explained.

"That's it," Officer Mullins went on, "he couldn't do anything except while in a slanting condition. What was the angle, Lieutenant?"

"Forty-nine degrees," McTavish replied.

"Forty-nine degrees, yeah, I remember now," continued Officer Mullins; "the boys used to call him the Forty-Niner. Well, some big doctors got wind of him and they got all excited over his having to slant all the time. So they finally made a deal with his father, Tom Marcus, in case Eddie died they should have sole rights to the body and investigate the brain and find out what made him slant.

"The old man wouldn't hear of it, at first, claim-

ing it was sacrilegious to cut up a dead man, but after a while he sold out, having run up the price to fifteen hundred by his superstitions, and the scientists gave him $500 down and signed a contract to hand him the other thousand when he delivered his son Eddie dead and in a coffin. Well, about a year later the doctors were notified about Eddie having cashed in and sure enough the old man arrived in Baltimore with the body. So they paid him the thousand they'd promised and he beat it.

"Well, the scientists got to work and cut open the brains and couldn't find anything wrong with them and they were sore as hell. They worked for a whole month but as far as they could see the brains were O.K. So they got suspicious and notified the police. That's how we began our check-up on the Marcuses, father and son. Lieutenant McTavish handled the whole thing, too. And the first thing we found out was that there was about four different hospitals had all bought the exclusive rights to Eddie Marcus's brains in order to investigate them when he was dead and discover what made him slant. And then we found out that old man Marcus had delivered a body to each of them claiming it was his son and that they had all been stung just the same as the scientists in Baltimore.

"It didn't take us long to figure out the kind of dirty work the Marcuses had been up to and we started huntin' for them, and it was three months before we could get track of either Eddie or his father. You wouldn't think a guy like that could

hide on account of his slanting and everybody knowing who he was as soon as they laid eyes on him. But he did. He got a job in a side-show in Coney Island and was on exhibition all summer while we was looking everywhere for him.

"But we got wind of it finally through a press-agent story in the newspapers and we went out there before he knew what was happening and nailed him. And it turned out that he and his old man was guilty of five different murders. They used to sell Eddie Marcus's brains and then kill somebody else and deliver him to the scientists. That's why they was always stung when they opened them up. Eddie was on the square all right, himself, and wasn't a fake either. He'd been born that way, on the bias, sort of. But he finally sat up straight for once—in the chair. And the scientists were sore as hell because the shock spoiled his brains and they couldn't find anything wrong with them."

Mr. Chittering mopped his brow.

"I see," he said, a happy, far-away smile in his eyes.

"That case was an exception," Lieutenant McTavish frowned. "And I wouldn't ever have found this Marcus you're talking about if he hadn't hired a press-agent to advertise himself."

"Who did you mean wasn't fooled by Panini?" Rufus Jr. inquired.

"Oh, yes, yes," Mr. Chittering straightened, "you were about to tell us . . ."

"Three weeks ago," McTavish began pensively,

"the whole Panini case was explained to me by a man named Hippolyt Bruga."

"What!" cried Officer Miller, "Him!"

"Yes," said McTavish, "he analyzed it down to every detail, offered me the perfect solution. And what is more, the exact motive. And I laughed at him."

"Remarkable," Mr. Chittering murmured; "is he a detective, this Mr. Booga. . . ?"

"No," McTavish snorted, "it doesn't sound as if he is, does it? Solving a mystery! Hm. He's a poet."

"I remember him," Rufus Jr. scowled. "A sort of freak, isn't he? Calls himself a Count . . ."

"I don't care what he calls himself," Lieutenant McTavish replied firmly, "he's a genius."

Mr. Chittering sat up.

"You don't mean," he demanded trembling, "that this man actually solved the mystery."

"Completely," sighed McTavish, "word for word."

"Good lord!" the old gentleman exclaimed, "I'd like to know him."

"There was always one thing that made me wonder about Winterbottom's guilt," McTavish went on. "I kept trying to forget it. But it stuck in my mind. It was the silk hat. A man doesn't commit a murder in a silk hat. Particularly a man who isn't used to wearing one."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Officer Miller interrupted, "how about Sam Schoenberger."

"Yeah," Officer Mullins smiled, "I'll bet you never heard anything as funny as the Schoenberger case, Mr. Chittering."

Mr. Chittering was certain in advance that he hadn't. The company accepted another round of cognac from Rufus Jr.

"Well," said Officer Miller, "that's the funniest one yet. This Sam Schoenberger ran a clothing store in Fourth Avenue. So one day he murdered his wife on account of her laziness. That was his alibi afterward. She was a lot younger than him and she drove him nuts with the way she wouldn't pay no attention to the business or raise a finger to do any work. So finally when he couldn't stand it any longer he killed her.

"Well, Sam used to be a chemist before he went into this new business and after he killed her he was still so mad at her for her being lazy that he embalmed her himself in the back of the store, working nights. Then he painted her face all up and put her in a swell gown and bought a gold chair and stuck her in the window as a dummy. She was a pretty woman with bobbed hair and what with being painted all up by him she made a good-looking dummy all right. You see he was still cracked about her refusing to help him with the business and that was his revenge.

"Well, they never would of found it out if it wasn't for Sergeant Ramsey. Old Ramsey used to pass the Schoenberger store on his way to the station every morning and he somehow got to noticing this

clothing dummy in Sam's window. He never could figure out what called his attention to it at first. But after a while he got to looking at it regularly and then pretty soon he felt there was something queer about it. You see, its hair kept growing, and old Ramsey noticed it getting longer.

"He didn't know what to make of it at first, but one night when the stores were all locked he was passing and noticed a light in Sam's place. The blind was drawn over the door but he stopped and peeked in under. And he saw Sam cutting the dummy's hair and giving it a bob again like it had. So he arrested him, hardly knowing why. And then it came out."

"But you said something about a silk hat," Rufus Jr. blinked, "about this Winterbottom."

"Oh, yes," Officer Miller went on hastily, "Sam always wore a silk hat when he went to the synagogue on Saturdays. And it was on a Friday night late when old Ramsey spotted him giving the haircut. And he had on his silk hat. I guess that's what I meant."

Lieutenant McTavish rose.

"I guess we'd better be going," he muttered. "I don't know what to do about this letter. We'll have to give it to the newspapers sooner or later."

"It won't do any harm to wait a while," Rufus Jr. suggested nervously. "It's going to raise the dickens with my business. . . . All that stuff about the impostors and how he put it over on me."

"Here," McTavish sighed, "you can have it then. I'm for letting the case drop."

He tossed the letter on the desk. Officers Miller and Mullins nodded proudly.

"Sure," Officer Mullins sighed, "there's no use in showing the young man up, and him just starting in the business."

Mr. Chittering, swaying a bit, as he stood smiling at his son, felt his heart warmed anew by this touch of human life.

"I would like to meet this man who solved the mystery," he addressed McTavish; "let's look him up. I'd—I'd like to show my appreciation of his genius . . ."

His head spinning with grisly echoes and gruesome images Mr. Chittering followed his son out of the office.

"We're going to make a night of it," he gripped McTavish eagerly by the elbow, "and hunt up this—this genius. Will you come along?"

"Yes," McTavish sighed, "I want to see him, too."

XXIV

I RIDE, SANG THE POET, ON THE BLACK RIVERS UNDER THE WORLD. I CLIMB THE TOWERS OF NIGHT AND STARE AT TOMORROWS. I WALK IN CAVERNS

EMPTIED BY TIME. THIS BEING THE CASE, WHAT INTEREST HAVE I IN STRIVING OR PROSPERING WHO SEE THE WORLD'S GOODS AS A DUST BLOWN THROUGH A DREAM?

I COUNT THE WORLD AS BEING DIVIDED INTO TWO RACES, CONTINUED OUR POET. THERE IS THE SMALL BUT TENACIOUS RACE OF POETS, AND THERE IS THE MULTITUDINOUS AND OVERWHELMING RACE OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT POETS. YOU AND I BELONG TO THESE RACES, YOU TO ONE, I TO THE OTHER. AND WE HAVE IN COMMON LITTLE MORE THAN THE IGNORANCE WITH WHICH WE ARE BORN AND THE IGNORANCE WHICH OVERCOMES US WHEN WE LIE DEAD.

YES, WE ARE BORN AND WE DIE, MOANED THE POET, AND WE HAVE A COMMON SHARE IN THESE DISAGREEABLE FACTS. FOR THE REST, OUR ROADS ARE SEPARATE. IT IS ON SEPARATE ROADS WE HURRY TO NOWHERE. YOU RIDE IN CARS AND TRAINS; ON TRACKS AND AVENUES. IT IS MY PRIVILEGE TO MAKE THE JOURNEY ON A KITE.

I AM A MOUNTEBANK ON A KITE, SANG THE POET, AND YOU ARE A TOURIST RESPIRATING PEACEFULLY IN A LOWER BERTH. WHAT RESPECT CAN YOU ASK OF ME WHO RIDE NOWHERE ON A KITE? WHAT OBEISANCE OF ONE WHO IS BEYOND THE CLOUDS OF DUST YOU VENERATE AS WEALTH AND HAPPINESS AND GOODS?

ALLOW ME MY KITE AND GIVE ME STRING, SANG THE POET. A GOOD WIND IS ALL I NEED. AND IF YOU HAVE AN EYE FOR SUCH THINGS YOU WILL FIND

IT EASY TO MISTAKE MY TISSUE-PAPER AND MY TAIL OF RAGS FOR AN EAGLE OR A COMET OR EVEN AN ANGEL SOARING HOME.

Alas, we who live within the dimensions of common expedience have little enough eye for Such Things. Metaphor is small excuse for wrong-doing. The illusion that one is riding on a kite does not benefit those upon whose feet one treads.

Yet if we would follow our hero on another evening it becomes necessary to leap on his kite with him; or to make at least some sort of leap—enough at all events to clear the street, to drift for a moment heels up through a mist of similes, to sample for a moment the nurse-winds of fancy.

It was observed once of Hippolyt Bruga that he was as insensitive as a hangman, as vain as a monkey and as absurd as Sinbad. This excellent observation was made by a woman who confessed she might have loved him could he have been trained to use a toothpick. Or, as Hippolyt replied, could she have been trained to prefer poetry to toothpicks.

There was another woman, who, at a safe distance, once remarked that the eyes of Hippolyt Bruga looked out of another world and reminded her of lost children and expiring demons. And there was still a third woman who once wept when she witnessed three cavaliers avenge her for an unspeakable insult by punching Hippolyt Bruga into a state of unconsciousness.

In fact there were many men as well as women

who at times experienced a curious awe toward the poet, who through the obscene and ludicrous antics of his body caught confusing glimpses of his soul. And there were many men and women who would have sat before him with the humbleness and respect which beauty sometimes inspires in those who are fortunate enough to know its face. But the poet in Hippolyt was a stranger to life. Neither coaxing nor obeisance could lure him into social existence.

Those who knocked at the door of his genius were greeted by a violent, unsavory and preposterous clown. A derisive ruffian assaulted them for their pains. Women pausing to murmur kindly and perhaps wistful words to Orpheus found themselves pursued by Jack-the-Ripper. Men responding in his presence to the urge of kinship found themselves crowned with a herring-barrel.

Yet there was a poet whose name was Hippolyt Bruga. There was a tender and curious man, gentle as a child who lifted his head in ecstasy to the color of a star; whose thoughts were as subtle and delicate as the utterances of nature. There was this man whose spirit sang at the touch of life, whose hands laid beautiful gifts upon altars. One caught a glimpse of him through the maze of poems he wrote—a lonely one, a vague silvered figure moving wraith-like behind the many colored pillars of fairy-land.

It was this hidden one who had sought to translate himself into realistic terms by the naïve purchase of a silk hat and a magnificent swallow-tail coat.

Intent upon shedding the repugnant chrysalis of Jules Ganz, this secreted one had succeeded, alas, in achieving no more than the clownish exterior of Hippolyt Bruga. The metamorphosis, however, had yielded the poet one breath of life. Under his silk hat, wrapped in the temporarily resplendent garments of aristocracy, this curious and unworldly soul had emerged for an instant, stared at a woman and kidnaped her image from reality. He had found a Princess named Amelia. Thenceforth within the fast withering grandeurs of his Nobility as within some castle falling to decay he had sat feasting with this memory. The Princess Amelia walked at his side, captive and queen, behind the many colored pillars of fairyland.

But her image had not sufficed. On the disappearance of the corporeal Amelia he had hunted for her desperately, his senses clamoring to share in the beauty of his dreams. Yet in the midst of his frantic search he had found himself often confused by the knowledge that she was real, that she was more than fantasy. He had knocked upon countless doors, raced crazily from day to day in quest of a living Amelia, yet he could not have told what he sought—a woman, a shadow, a memory. . . .

The secret world in which he lived had stared at him out of the eyes of a woman. All he knew of beauty had worn the smile of Amelia. Amusing illusion! But what more is love than the ironical enchantment which places a star upon the brow of

strumpets? A woman steals our dreams and we give chase. . . .

Hippolyt gave chase, pursuing both the phantom and the reality. Mournfully he embraced the one; frantically he sought the other. He would continue his embrace and his search, dragging himself out of debauches and disasters; search until he found her. This he told himself, and his love filled him with the happiness and despair which are the inkwells of poetry. He considered the vanished Amelia as the indescribable mystery upon whose face only chosen ones may look. His soul knelt at the grave of her absence. He would have killed himself for a glimpse of her. Thus he continued through days whose mishaps and defeats were less than a murmur in his ears.

And then on an evening filled with snow and the muted tumult of streets he came rushing out of a theater alley—a disheveled Jason with an address in his hand. He stood in front of the theater in which Panini, the Magician, had once performed. A sympathetic stage-hand, impressed by his tireless inquiries, had interceded for him. Amelia—the Princess Amelia, yes, the same one who had assisted Panini—had called at the theater two weeks ago during a rehearsal to ask for work. And the stage-hand had taken her address. Hippolyt, the address in his hand, stood bewildered under the theater canopy. He felt strangely overcome by the pantomime of crowds and lighted buildings. He blinked his eyes and worked his mouth to keep from weep-

ing. Then he grew frightened at the thought that he was standing motionless. He desired to spring forward, to fly. But he seemed to have become inanimate. Tears finally ran down his half-frozen cheeks.

He had found her! An overwhelming loveliness filled the world. His secret surrounded him. His dreams wore the cloak of life. The flutter of snow over slanting hats, the blazing-windowed juggernaut of the city riding through the night trailing its calliope of signs—all that he saw and heard in these moments came to him as a caress.

The Princess Amelia lived in a house less than a mile away, and this that he saw was her court. A stream of water dripping onto his neck through the torn crown of his silk hat attracted his attention. He considered the trickle of water down his frost-bitten skin a delicious sensation. And he began to walk through the snow. His legs moved faster and faster and he began to run. He ran as if he were an irresistible force before which the crowd of figures blocking his way must dissolve. Striking out with his elbows, thrusting with his hands and cane, he careened onward. He caromed from stomach to stomach leaving a trail of bruised and overturned citizens in his wake. He reached an open space, raced for five minutes as if pursued by a thousand devils, came to an abrupt halt, darted about frantically in search of street-signs, oriented himself with difficulty and drew up dizzied and breathless before an ancient-looking rooming house. His legs were

vibrating as if made of rubber and his mouth was bleeding with exertion. He rang a bell, pounded on the door and caught his breath in a succession of sobs.

A fat woman resembling a small wagon-load of pillows finally answered. Hippolyt rubbed the snow out of his eyes, ceased sobbing and lowered his head in a fixed glower.

"Have you a young woman named Amelia living here?" he demanded slowly, "Miss Amelia Plotka?"

The wagon-load of pillows quivered, swayed and stared intently.

"Amelia Plotka," said Hippolyt through his teeth and lurched toward the opened doorway. The fat woman spoke.

"Come in," she said.

Hippolyt entered a musty, dimly lighted rooming-house parlor. The door closed behind him.

"I am Mrs. Hankey," said the huge woman, "I am the landlady."

And she continued to regard the visitor with her intent and bulbous face.

"Are you a friend of hers?" she inquired of the menacing eyes that returned her stare.

"Yes," said Hippolyt explosively.

"Are you an old friend?" Mrs. Hankey pursued.

A second Yes exploded from his lips.

"What's your name?" demanded Mrs. Hankey.

"My name is Hippolyt Bruga. Count Hippolyt Bruga."

"Hm," said Mrs. Hankey, "I never heard her mention you."

Hippolyt had risen.

"Where is Amelia?" he began. Mrs. Hankey lowered herself with difficulty into a chair. Her body shook, slid and assumed new shapes as she teetered back.

"Amelia," she answered with a gasp, "is dead. She died three days ago. On Wednesday night. You didn't hear anything about it?"

One look at the motionless visitor assured her that he hadn't. He was standing and regarding her almost as if he had fallen asleep on his feet.

"She got a cold," Mrs. Hankey went on, her manner softening, the rooming-house landlady slowly disappearing. "Oh, my God, it was terrible. Such a young woman. So pretty. I cried all night."

Dabbing at her eyes as if in verification of her softer nature, Mrs. Hankey threw an appraising glance at her visitor and became confused. The rigid figure in front of her halted her for the moment. "It's snowing outside, ain't it?" she inquired faintly.

"Yes," said Hippolyt.

Mrs. Hankey recovered herself.

"So you were an old friend," she went on. She felt herself mysteriously deflated by the inhumanness of the old friend. But the egoism of bad news sustained her. "Sit down, go on," she offered kindly. Hippolyt obeyed, his eyes fixed on her. "The cold gave her a fever," Mrs. Hankey resumed, a bit officially. "She had it for three days. I wanted to

move her to a good room but the doctor said no. She came to her room one night after she'd been looking for a job. She kept on looking and looking. And I told her, don't worry. You'll pay me next week. Then she came home and went to bed and when I come upstairs to make the bed she's lying in it, burning up and she keeps on crying, 'Oh, my God! I ain't got no slippers. I ain't got no lavender slippers.'

"So I keep asking her what's the matter. And I see she's sick and burning up and when I listen to her a while I understand she found a job where she wears a purple dress on the stage and he told her, the man, to bring a pair of lavender slippers to match. And that was all she kept on with day and night for three days—that she ain't got none."

Mrs. Hankey sighed and quivered. She wiped the tears out of her eyes and murmured, "Yes, yes, I cried all night. She was so young and pretty looking." She paused and resumed in a sturdier voice: "Last summer when she was working for the magician who got killed she had such fine clothes and things. But after he got killed she changed altogether. She slept most of the time and nobody could wake her up and when she would wake up she would be different. She acted like she'd come out of a hospital. Well, when she got the cold I called the doctor Tuesday morning and he said it was pneumonia and I shouldn't move her. And Wednesday night she could hardly talk any more but she kept moaning, the poor little thing, for the lavender

slippers. Oh, my God, when I remember her moaning for them slippers like—like . . ." Mrs. Hankey broke off. She regarded her visitor for a pause and then inquired almost perfunctorily, "Would you like to know where she's buried?"

Hippolyt nodded his head.

"Well, there wasn't no money," Mrs. Hankey answered, "so I had to give her to the city coroner and he took her to Potter's Field. You can find out from the coroner. And there's a doctor bill," Mrs. Hankey's tears appeared once more, "and the room-rent for three weeks, the poor little thing. Besides a lot of extras. . . . I can't afford it no matter how much I liked her. I'm only a poor woman. . . ."

Hippolyt had risen. He said nothing and walked to the door. Mrs. Hankey managed to regain her feet by the time he had opened it. She waddled after him crying, "Hey, mister, just a minute . . ." Her eyes located him in the street. He was already half a block off and running like a madman through the snow.

XXV

Hippolyt Bruga sat in the disreputable cabaret into which he had stumbled with his grief and drank glass upon glass of sour wine. He had not slept during the night. Darkness had filled his heart during the ensuing day. He had prowled purposeless through the winter streets and the world had become

to him empty of all meaning and allure now that it no longer contained Amelia.

He gave his loss no thought. He moved within a revulsion toward living that found expression neither in words nor plans. He would, he had decided during the night, kill himself and the decision remained blindly in his mind.

But as he prowled a thought had entered his despair and unexpectedly he found himself with an objective—a strange and overwhelming purpose to his hour. There was something to be done before he died. There was one thing more. . . .

He would buy a pair of lavender slippers and take them to the grave in which Amelia lay. He would place them on the snow above her feet. She had desired them, wept for them as she lay dying.

Feverishly he counted his money, all that was left of the funds intrusted to him by Sarastro. He divided the four five-dollar bills, placing two of them in his hip-pocket. With them he would buy the lavender slippers.

To his dismay he found the afternoon passed, the stores closed. After banging futilely at the doors of a half dozen shops he encountered the electric sign of a basement cabaret. He entered. The noise and crowd soothed him. Here, he murmured to himself, was a solitude fitting his mood.

He had started on his third bottle of sour wine when a woman sat down at his table and smiled at him. Regarding her through half-closed eyes he beheld the gaunt and painted face of a neighborhood

siren. He thrust forth his lower lip, glowered and remained silent. He was thinking of lavender slippers—smooth, silken and beautiful. His entire existence was contained in the image of lavender slippers. His destiny had become limited to their purchase. He sat dreaming of them, drinking his sour wine, visioning himself placing the lavender slippers on the snow above the feet of her who lay buried. This vision made another night of living endurable.

The gaunt and painted face opposite him spoke: "How about a little drink, honey?" it inquired.

Hippolyt, immobile, watched her help herself from his bottle. A half-hour later as he poured the last of a fourth bottle into his glass, he reached across the table and seized the siren's hand.

"You are the remains of a carnival," he raised his voice above the cabaret din; "you are the torn and tinseled veil of grief."

The woman smiled seriously and changed her seat. She took an empty chair next to him and under cover of the noise and merry-making about them, caressed him boldly.

"I gotta room upstairs," she whispered close to him and fingered the lobe of his ear. Tears appeared in Hippolyt's eyes.

"You offer an ironical prelude to death," he sighed.

Here in the arms of this gaunt and painted siren he felt suddenly weakened and humble. The waiter presented a check for eight dollars. Hippolyt re-

moved the money from his hip-pocket and then realizing what he was doing replaced the two five-dollar bills in a panic.

"That's for slippers," he mumbled thickly, "lavender slippers on the grave. Silk slippers to hold the memory of dancing yesterdays. Slippers," he repeated and the tears falling from his eyes checked him. The waiter waited stoically while he fumbled through his other pockets and produced another pair of five-dollar bills. Pocketing the change Hippolyt glowered at the man through his tears and muttered:

"Beat it, I never give tips."

He stood up unsteadily, the gaunt and painted one at his side. They moved through the crowd. It was snowing. Hippolyt stared at the whitening street.

"On her feet," he spoke dreamily, "so that she can sleep. On her feet. On the snow . . ."

"You can keep that dough for the slippers," the woman spoke. "Sure. I don't want it. I just want you. Come on, honey."

She led him toward a doorway.

"Lodging for the night," murmured Hippolyt, "and love. Love," he smiled dreamily at the painted face, "the music of fairyland."

With these cryptic words he followed her stumblingly up the dark stairs.

. . . . . .

It was still dark when he awoke. The woman slept beside him, the pillow tinted with the rouge and colored powder rubbed from her peaked face.

He sat up and shivered. The room was cold. Automatically the memories of the night left him. His obsession returned. The stores would be open in a few hours. He would buy a pair of lavender slippers. His eyes grew strange and dreamy as he began to dress feverishly. The woman continued to sleep.

Clothed, he remembered something and plunged his hand into his hip-pocket. It was empty. The ten dollars were gone. He began a panicky search through his other pockets, bringing to light a scant handful of dimes and quarters—two dollars in all. His panic gave way to a rage. He had been robbed.

Beside himself, he turned to the sleeping woman. He must terrify her, threaten to kill her. She had stolen his ten dollars, his lavender slippers. He advanced raging to the bed and then paused. She would deny it. He might find the money if he looked for it. He turned and snatched a purse from the dresser. It was empty. He fell upon the dresser-drawers next, heaping the floor with their contents. He tore open a suitcase and emptied it. He dropped to the floor, turned over the rugs, crawled under the bed, attacked the mattress, lifted the pillows and ripped them open. His frenzy was swift and methodical. The room became a rubbish-heap of feathers, rugs and clothes, and the woman on the bed continued to sleep.

At length Hippolyt rose, his eyes bloodshot, his face contorted. He moved toward the bed once more, murder in his hands. But standing over it

he paused. At his feet reposed a pair of shoes. His eyes spying them, he halted. A pair of dilapidated purple shoes—bright purple shoes—run down at the heels, one standing up, the other tipped over—confronted him. They belonged to the creature in the bed. They had carried her up and down pavements in quest of men, up and down the dark stairs. Bulging, stained and torn, they lay upon the floor like a pair of disabled manikins. But staring at them Hippolyt perceived only that they were purple—bright purple. He bent over and seized them, thrust them into his overcoat pocket and pushing his battered silk hat firmly on his head tiptoed out of the room.

In the light outside—it was dawn—he studied the bulging, stained and worn purple shoes. Tears filled his eyes. He felt strangely weakened and humble. His head was light. A vague distraction lay curiously over his nature.

He walked on rapidly hugging the purple shoes to his side.

"To place at the feet of my dream," he whispered.

XXVI

Mr. Chittering, accustomed though he was to playing the host to renown and prestige, felt oddly distrait on this evening. Presidents of Republics, monarchial gentlemen and ladies, satraps of com-

merce and high Brahmins of the arts had filed by the hundreds through these polychromed doors into the celebrated Gothic dining hall without causing the Chittering pulse to skip a beat.

Mr. Chittering was, indeed, most at home in the society of idols. He had known instinctively what to say to the Rajah of Koohbar, a perverse and melancholy autocrat under a cloud at the time for having blinded three of his concubines suspected of infidelity. He had found without effort the proper words with which to inspire the sensitive respect of those itinerant effigies who stumble from day to day bewilderedly through our all too democratic midst.

As for home talent, a veritable rabble of great thinkers and noble souls had passed under Mr. Chittering's wistful but unperturbed eye. Yet on this night, Mr. Chittering was as ill at ease as an amateur suburban hostess.

It may have been his usual embarrassment in the presence of poverty. He always felt most wretched in the midst of philanthropic gestures and he had always experienced a guilty lack of words when addressing small incomes.

He sat now at the head of the long, effulgent table like some unsuccessful Alice in Wonderland. A disquieting transformation had befallen his guests. There was McTavish, squirming at his right as if he were sitting on a piece of flypaper. And there was Mr. Winterbottom, on his left, looking like a stuffed sparrow. And there was Mrs. Winterbottom.

Mr. Chittering had considered this lady a pleasing and modest wife. He regarded her now with mild astonishment. She presented the unexpected appearance of a sexual totem-pole. She seemed not so much a woman as a creature made up of libidinous symbols. It was difficult to think of her in any other light than as the heroine of a thousand amours. This perturbed Mr. Chittering and upset his preconceived ideas.

The magician Sarastro sitting beside her offered another perturbing spectacle. He had selected a suit of black velvet for the evening. His face was unusually pale and his eyes glistened with mascara. He appeared to be doing his best to enter a trance state and his rigid, necessarily preoccupied air affected Mr. Chittering unhappily.

There was also the vague apparition of Dr. Smith. This personage who had seemed only a few hours ago an affable and worldly fellow had faded into a curious gray silence—so much so that Mr. Chittering felt certain he would vanish at any moment. Next to him the young and didactic Miss Langweiler appeared to have been stricken with a paralysis which left her with her mouth opened and her head uncomfortably tilted to one side. As a matter of fact, Miss Langweiler was trying to talk. She had assumed the posture of conversation a full ten minutes before—but as yet had managed to get nothing said. Rufus Chittering, Jr., next to her was responsible. She had been sitting all this time with sentences poised for his attention. His eyes, however, seemed

to have become permanently trapped by the carnal splendors of Mrs. Winterbottom across the table.

Mr. Chittering struggled against the curious social terror which was apparently stifling his guests. He struggled, however, in vain. For facing him at the other end of the table was the persistent and unnerving phenomenon of his guest of honor—Count Hippolyt Bruga.

It was impossible not to look at this strange person. And even detaching one's eyes was of little use. For it was impossible not to feel his presence, however one avoided it. Mr. Chittering, who, in his day, had snubbed personages of downright legendary importance, was powerless. He coughed, attempted a little badinage, gave orders to the servants, resorted to unintelligible small talk with the perspiring McTavish and finally ended by fidgeting in his seat and breaking into a nervous sweat.

The phenomenon was neither to be appeased nor ignored. An implacable hate distorted the face of the guest of honor. He turned deliberately to sneer at the butler, measuring him from heel to crown, noting his manner and his livery with a series of critical snorts that were in themselves little short of devastating. The butler out of range, he fell to eyeing the tapestries on the wall with a contempt intended obviously to wither them. He turned insulting glances upon each piece of silver, each item of luxury and art that had the misfortune to attract him. He sat immobile and merciless, and Mr. Chittering fidgeted about more and more as if he were

sitting at his board with a bombshell in his lap.

Hippolyt's attention solicited by one of the guests, he listened in malevolent silence and answered with snorts which increased in moistness and explosiveness as he grew more adept at uttering them. With the arrival of the soup Hippolyt stood up and addressed the startled servant:

"I do not intend to eat any food. You may spare yourself the trouble of bringing me any further offerings."

Whereupon he walked to the huge buffet on the other side of the room, gathered five unopened wine bottles into his arms and returned with dignity to his chair. He placed the bottles in front of him in the form of a rampart.

Mr. Chittering smiled eagerly and beckoned a servant to open them.

"All of them?" whispered the man.

"Yes," said Hippolyt coldly, "unless Mr. Chittering objects."

"Oh, no," Mr. Chittering made haste to answer, "not at all."

Five corks popped in succession. Miss Langweiler giggled. McTavish gyrated peculiarly in his seat as if he were in the throes of St. Vitus' dance. Winterbottom, fascinated by the guest of honor's behavior, ventured a comment.

"Heavens, you're not going to drink all of that!"

Hippolyt refilled his two glasses slowly and in the hysterical hush that followed, stared with contempt at the speaker. Mr. Chittering shut his eyes. But

the bombshell failed to materialize. Instead Hippolyt arose, holding one of the wine glasses aloft.

"I am the guest of honor at this banquet," he announced coldly, "and I drink to the confusion of all fools. Happy days."

Mr. Chittering raised his glass quickly and sipped at it. The remainder of the company hesitated and then followed suit. Hippolyt, this ritual over, seated himself and grimaced what might have been taken for displeasure over the taste of the wine.

"We have some sweeter wine," Mr. Chittering volunteered amiably.

"This will do," Hippolyt answered with some show of condescension. "I have been invited to this banquet as guest of honor," he repeated eyeing his host. At this, Mr. Chittering nodded cheerfully.

"You were asked to honor my table with your presence," he answered.

"You mean," Hippolyt sneered, "I was asked to come here so I might applaud your wealth and hospitality. It is one of the peculiarities of the rich that they are most happy when they are able to make others uncomfortable by the evidences of their superior wealth."

"I hope," Mr. Chittering countered, his eyes beginning to twinkle, "that you are not uncomfortable."

"Not for any reasons you can imagine," replied Hippolyt. He emptied another glass of wine. "Murillo," he announced pointing angrily at the wall, "is a fifth rate artist. And this entire room is reminiscent of a demented lollypop."

"I merely bought the room," smiled Mr. Chittering, ignoring the appalled goglings of his guests, "I didn't design or construct it."

"Nevertheless," Hippolyt frowned, "you cannot deny that you are responsible for its existence."

"No," Mr. Chittering agreed fairly.

"I thought not," the guest of honor sneered, and forthwith attacked another fresh bottle.

"It is a most beautiful room, sir," Winterbottom squeaked defiantly, "and reminds me of the beauty of the Renaissance."

"This room," Hippolyt stared at him coldly, "undoubtedly reminds you of the fact that you are sitting in the presence of a fabulously wealthy man. Your little soul therefore prostrates itself unctuously before it."

"There is such a thing as good manners." Mrs Winterbottom puckered her forehead. Hippolyt ignored the thrust with a curl of his lip. His eyes turned to his host.

"Luxury," he announced, "is a feather with which sleepy women and old men tickle themselves into a vague life."

"It is because you are used to the aristocracy of Europe, Excellenz," Sarastro purred hopefully, "that you are indifferent to the splendors of the new world."

"It is because I live among beauties superior to those peddled in the department stores," Hippolyt contradicted him, "that I find myself distressed in the presence of bourgeois bric-a-brac. The over-

stuffed dreams of menials," he added, waving his hand to include the furnishings, "for this artists have toiled and planned!" He concluded with an unnerving burst of mocking laughter.

"Well," Rufus Jr. burst forth, "here's to good old beauty, then. Long may she wave."

Hippolyt ignored the toast but emptied his fifth glass.

"Come," Mr. Chittering cajoled his nervous guests amiably, "let us drink to beauty."

Winterbottom, the wine fast befuddling him, gazed around dizzily and discovering the guest of honor in a seemingly dreamy moment addressed him.

"I understand," he squeaked, "that you were convinced from the first of my innocence."

"Your innocence," Hippolyt answered, regarding the reddening face of McTavish, "your innocence is an anti-climax I anticipated from the first moment I saw you."

Winterbottom nodded with obvious misunderstanding.

"Exactly," he said.

"You owe your life, however," pursued Hippolyt, "to the sentimental lapse of an otherwise remarkable man."

"Who?" Winterbottom wanted to know.

"Panini," Hippolyt chuckled.

Mrs. Winterbottom stiffened.

"Don't talk to him, Oliver," she whispered.

"Panini," the guest of honor enunciated the name with violence.

"That fiend," Mrs. Winterbottom added, lowering her eyes.

"Panini was not a fiend but a charlatan," Sarastro corrected her stiffly.

Hippolyt beat the table with a knife to attract attention.

"Panini," he cried, "was a man lacking the courage of his mirth. He tiptoed along the delicate precipice of laughter, but he was afraid of God. Nevertheless, I drink to Panini—a true friend and a remarkable critic of life."

There was naught to do but drink, quickly and unreasonably. Through the soothing vapors loosed in the mind by the wine, Hippolyt became a durable phenomenon. He continued to talk loudly and relentlessly, abusing his fellow guests in sentences that became too full of clauses to unravel. Mr. Chittering began to feel exhilarated. There came to the old gentleman the notion that he had been translated into another age—that he was presiding at a ducal table of a vanished century. The wealth of the room, its opulence and works of art seemed to him to achieve a dramatic significance.

There had been genius and renown in this room before. But, he thought with a sudden thrill, never life. He saw his guest of honor as this mysterious thing—life. An unscrupulous wind that had never before blown through this guarded room emanated from the words of this strange poet. And Mr. Chittering, assisted by three glasses of wine, was charmed, enthralled and ready to perceive a vital meaning

in the carryings on of his guest of honor. He had assembled the party with many misgivings. The thirst for adventure which was slowly disturbing the serenity of his late years had inspired the gesture. Here they were now, he thought, the fragments of a drama, the embattled pawns of life.

A gasp from Mrs. Winterbottom brought him out of his reverie. Her cheeks flaming, she was staring with an expression of horror at Hippolyt, a few feet removed from her.

"How dare you! How—how dare you!" she managed to speak.

Hippolyt returned her gaze coldly.

"Oh, so you resent my caresses," he replied.

Mrs. Winterbottom struggled in silence to wrench her chair out of a mysterious force clutching it under the table. Setting his jaws, Hippolyt braced himself with his hands against the table edge.

"Oliver," the poor woman cried, "help me . . . please."

Her husband unable to follow this unexpected situation regarded her with great perplexity. Her violent efforts to disengage herself and the chair were crowned with a sudden victory. She stumbled back and would have sprawled to the floor if Sarastro had not caught her. Rufus Jr., blushing deeply, turned to his father in dismay.

"There are some women," Hippolyt addressed the company, still aghast at this incredible by-play, "who are all on the surface!" He fastened accusing eyes on Mrs. Winterbottom.

"When it comes to sex, beauty is a false alarm. And I don't mean maybe."

For a moment he permitted himself a reminiscent grimace of distaste and then forthwith turned his back and prepared to bestow his favors upon the frightened Miss Langweiler. Mrs. Winterbottom endeavored surreptitiously to remove a long smear of shoe-blacking extending the entire length of her gray silk stocking, and the incident was temporarily obliterated by the graceful conduct of the servants. They replenished the platters, poured more wine and murmured solicitously behind the heads of the diners. And strangely enough, despite the untoward happenings, the party began to lose its stiffness. Talk spread a hurried tentative sound around the table. McTavish sought to recall with an effort at humor the absurd opinions he had held of Winterbottom. Sarastro, abandoning his attempt to achieve a trance state, was accomplishing rather unusual feats with his napkin. Dr. Smith launched into the recital of a long winded and unusually pointless literary anecdote. And Mr. Chittering felt happy.

The guest of honor appeared, for the moment at least, to have been met and vanquished. The truth was, however, that Hippolyt under cover of the noises around him was deep in immoral solicitations of Miss Langweiler. He insisted in sibilant whispers that she retire to an unoccupied room with him.

The young woman, slowly emerging from her original social paralysis, seized upon these overtures

as a tête-à-tête. She replied with a wealth of coy gesturing and attractive archness.

"Oh, no, no, Hippolyt," she smirked, rolling her eyes around the table as if to call attention to her sudden popularity. "Really, you mustn't talk like that."

"Why not?" Hippolyt raised his voice indignantly "Who are you that you can tell me how to talk?" He concluded with outraged hiccup.

Miss Langweiler clung to the illusion of a tète-â-tète, her words becoming more mincing and saccharine.

"Oh, no, really," she laughed, "you know why." And she smiled archly at Winterbottom who, it seemed, had suddenly fallen to quoting Latin to his host.

Hippolyt leaned back in his chair. His face was becoming extremely red and his eyes were growing rimmed with an odd pink light. Pointing his finger at Winterbottom he broke into song,

"Oh, it's up the rope he goes, up he goes
Oh, it's up the rope he goes, up he goes . . ."

His voice, ascending, collapsed amid the high notes. He arose, staggering, and made his way to the buffet. There were three bottles of wine still unopened. These he seized and began walking around the room bellowing an outrageous song—

"Oh, my name is Joe Taylor
My——"

The butler offered a deft and fortunate interruption. He appeared with a guiding hand beside the guest of honor. Hippolyt allowed himself to be moved toward the chair. Here he halted and waved a bottle over his head:

"Let the night come down," he cried. Turning, he appeared to become conscious of the butler for the first time. He swung his fist and cracked the startled man on the nose. It began to bleed.

"Sit down," McTavish cried. Rufus Jr. stepped away from his chair, his shoulders lifted.

"Please," Mr. Chittering rubbed his hands together nervously.

"A deluge of ugliness," remarked Hippolyt, looking down on Miss Langweiler as he slipped into his seat. The eating appeared permanently interrupted.

"Beauty," cried Hippolyt, ignoring the commotion about him and emptying another glass in a single gulp, "beauty is a dance in the snow. Do you know where they buried her?" he hiccuped violently in Miss Langweiler's ear, "under the snow and I left them there for her to dance in, at night when the stars drift close."

Miss Langweiler winced as a hand gripped her under the table. She bit her lip and endeavored to be unconcerned. But the hand persisted and finally wrenched an exclamation of pain from her.

"Ouch," she cried. "Oh, my God!

She sprang to her feet. The company was standing. They were talking in indignant unison. The

servants, led by the glowering butler, edged nearer the guest of honor.

"It's outrageous," Rufus Jr. cried above the babble. "Now look here, father, if this creature . . ."

Hippolyt poured another glass down his throat. This done, he lurched toward Mrs. Winterbottom before she had time to retreat. With an ear-splitting guffaw he slapped her resoundingly on the rear.

"Come on," he cried, "we're going to dance. Music . . . music . . . through a deluge of ugliness."

He seized her for a moment in his arms, bent her determinedly backward and toppled with her to the floor. Rufus Jr. jumped to the horrified woman's assistance.

"Shut up," Hippolyt bellowed, waving his arms over his head, "I'm the guest of honor. . . . Stand back."

The servants laid hands on him. Galvanized by the touch, the poet sprang to his feet, snatched a bottle from the table and clouted the nearest head with it. The bottle smashed. Hippolyt, a ferocity distorting his reddened face, plunged into the knot of gladiators.

"Swine," he bellowed, "Canaille."

The two women screamed. Glass began to break. The chairs gave way. One of the tapestries came down in a shower of colored plaster. Mr. Chittering stood looking with unbelieving eyes at the scene. An odd, frightened sense filled him. He felt strange and futile. Figures danced before him, and a wild

voice continued roaring. Its violence moved across the room.

"This is the way you treat the guest of honor," came from the doorway for a last time. And then a surprising stillness fell in the dining hall.

Outside, his face flattened against the snow-covered ground, blood spurting from the side of his mouth, Hippolyt lay with a figure sitting on his back and fists punching grimly at his head. . . .

"The guest of honor," he sneered into the snow. And despite the blows his voice rose in a parrotlike laugh through the night.

THE END

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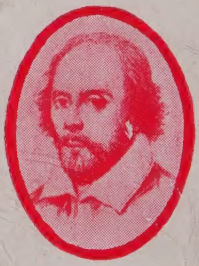

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